BY A MATHEY

DUKE OF KANDOS

LONDON: J. & R. MAXWELL

1/-

A Mathey is a French writer, about whom nothing is known.

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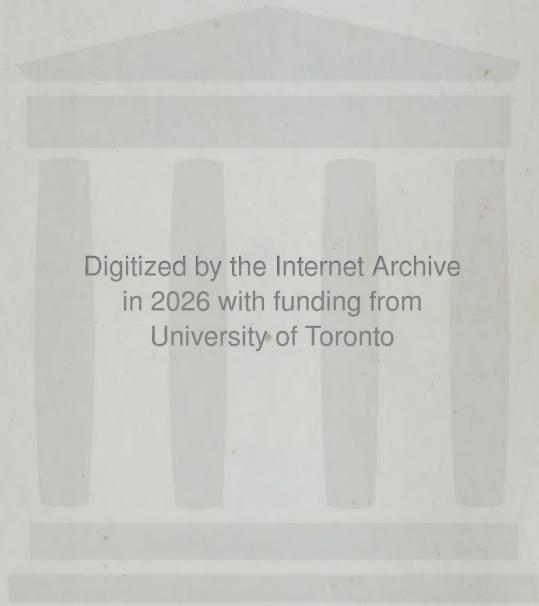
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DUKE OF KANDOS

FROM THE FRENCH OF

A. MATHEY

BY

FRANK PINCKNEY CLARK

London:

JOHN & ROBERT MAXWELL

MILTON HOUSE, 14 & 15, SHOE LANE, FLEET STREET,

AND

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THE DUKE OF KANDOS.

FIRST PART.

THE MURDER OF COCO.

CHAPTER I.

THE POLICE ARRIVE.

THREE reports of a revolver rapidly succeeded one another at irregular intervals.

Two of the shots were almost simultaneous, then there was an interval of several seconds before the last.

It was easy to distinguish the sounds of two weapons—the first shot was sharp, the next two were evidently of heavier calibre.

It was nearly ten o'clock in the evening of the month of May, 1869.

It had been a cloudy day, and it was a rainy evening. The street of Trois-Couronnes, in the eleventh district, and the boulevard of Belleville, which it crossed, were both deserted, although the hour was early. This quarter is inhabited by working-people, who, fatigued with the day's labor, retire early; and the humid and chilly temperature of the early part of May does not invite the gossips to stop on the side walk.

The sound of the shots came from the sixth story of a large old house, of sad and ruined aspect, situated at the corner of the street and the boulevard, and making part of the block formed by the street of Trois-Couronnes on the north, the boulevard of Belleville on the east, the street Oberkampf on the south, and the street Moret on the west.

This block, or rather perfectly isolated quadrilateral, is of no great extent, and is almost exclusively composed of tenement houses.

In a more central quarter, where the rattling of carriages and omnibuses and the uproar of a noisy crowd fill the streets, these three shots would not have awakened the attention of the nearest neighbors.

But in Trois-Couronnes street they resounded mournfully amid the silence, and could be heard at some distance. They attracted the attention of two squads of police, who just then were passing, one on the boulevard of Belleville, the other in Moret street.

These two squads, separated only by the depth of the houses, were each composed of two policemen; they instantly stopped to find out where the sounds came from.

At the same moment many windows were opened on every side of the block, and men and women leaned out and commenced interrogating each other.

In the house where the shots were fired the tenants were awakened; and soon the halls were filled with half-clad people. Some ran up to the sixth story, while others ran down to call the janitor.

They rushed pell-mell against one another, asking questions which were answered by questions.

"Have you heard?"

"What?"

"In the sixth story, is it not?"

"Evidently."

"In which room?"

"The new tenant's?"

"The old man's?"

"I am going for the janitor."

"I am going up."

"Has anyone entered the room?"

"Have you heard anything?"

"Nothing at all; not a cry—not a groan. The door is locked. I could hear nothing, and I am his nearest neighbor."

"It is astonishing."

"It is a suicide."

"Oh, a suicide! But one cannot shoot himself three times."

"And the shots were evidently from different pistols," added a gunsmith, who lived on the fifth floor.

"Are you sure?"

"Undoubtedly."

"What is all this? What has happened?" all at once said someone, in an authoritative tone.

"Ah! here is Monsieur Niquelet, the janitor."

Slowly climbing the stairs, carrying a light in one hand, for the gas had been extinguished, appeared a little man, thin, dry, bony, about fifty years of age, and slightly lame.

It was indeed Monsieur Niquelet himself—having been crippled by the falling of a beam in a ship-yard, where he had worked some years before, he had been appointed a janitor in one of the houses of his former employer.

Suddenly awakened, he had hurriedly put on his pantaloons, and his bristly grey hair had escaped from his night-cap, of a doubtful white, while his beard, which dated from the preceding Sunday—it was now Wednesday—was a thick stubble on his red chin.

"What is all this?" he repeated, in a hoarse tone; "who presumes to awaken the whole house by firing off a pistol?"

"The old man in the sixth story," replied many voices.

"Monsieur Loriot?"

"Yes."

"We will go and see what it means."

As Monsieur Niquelet mounted the stairs the tenants crowded after him, the women going first.

When they reached the last landing, Monsieur Niquelet found himself the leader of at least thirty persons of both sexes and of all ages.

There was an instant of profound silence, as they stopped before a yellow door. Everyone held his breath; heads were bent forward, and, with staring eyes, they listened intently.

Monsieur Niquelet solemnly struck two or three blows with his fist to announce his presence and demand admission.

Not a word. A silence as of death.

"Monsieur Loriot!" exclaimed the janitor——"It is I, Niquelet——open the door——what the devil are you doing in there?"

The silence was unbroken.

Monsieur Niquelet stooped to look through the keyhole, but the key, which was in the lock, prevented his seeing anything. The only thing of which he was certain was that there was a light in the room.

"I see nothing," he grumbled, "and I can hear nothing; Monsieur Loriot, are you ill?" he added, in a solemn voice, which terror had somewhat softened.

"I think he must be very ill, or has killed himself, or some one has killed him."

"Do you think so?"

"*Parbleu!* One does not shoot a pistol for nothing; and since he makes no noise he must be dead."

"That is true! Break in the door, Father Niquelet. We must see what has happened."

Several of the strongest men advanced toward the door, but "Father" Niquelet resolutely placed himself before it.

"Stop a moment, my children, I am opposed to this. I am responsible, I shall go for the police, all of you just remain where you are. Do not break in the door."

"He is right," said several women, "it is better to call in the police."

"That is my business; I am going this instant to the station-house. Stay where you are and watch the door."

Hurrying his steps, Father Niquelet clattered down the stairs, grumbling between his long teeth, rendered yellow by the use of tobacco.

"A crime in the house—that's nice! and weather that is not fit for a dog to go out in."

He opened the door, but had not far to go.

Upon the steps he found himself face to face with a little assembly gathered before the door, and toward which the police, guided by the directions of the neighbors, were coming from the two opposite extremities of the street.

In a few words Father Niquelet made them understand the situation.

One of the policemen was sent to fetch a locksmith, and also a police officer. Another guarded the door, and kept back the crowd, while two followed the janitor to the sixth story to watch the room in which had been enacted the drama, as yet unknown, which opens this recital.

CHAPTER II.

MONO, THE NEGRO.

THE police-station was not far off; so, a few moments later, the commissary of police appeared. He was accompanied by detectives, his secretary, and a locksmith who had been summoned, and who held in his hands the different tools circumstances might call for.

The police captain was a stout little man, plump and apoplectic-looking, with large, protruding eyes, turned-up nose, low forehead, and prominent jaws; a bull-dog head, in a word.

He appeared to be in a very bad humor.

Placed in a popular quarter where he rarely had an affair with fashionable and refined people, he had formed the habit of treating his prisoners with great brutality—a brutality which was natural to him, and which had, moreover, prevented his appointment to one of the central districts of the city.

This vexed and irritated him, and he revenged himself by making his hand felt by the poor devils whose evil star brought them into his clutches. The iron hand was without the velvet glove, so dear to picturesque writers.

"Let us see, what is all this?" grumbled he, stopping at the head of the stairs to recover his breath and to wipe the perspiration off his forehead, for the slightest effort at climbing stopped his breath and made him perspire. "Some drunken row, is it not? It is enough to break one's heart! One hundred and twenty-five steps! One might swear that they did it on purpose!"

"Captain ——," replied the janitor, "the door is closed, and we have called and knocked in vain; no one has answered. We are afraid that something very terrible has happened."

"Very good—very good!" interrupted M. Blaireau—that was the captain's name. "We shall soon see."

He advanced to the door, gave two sharp raps, and, in a bass voice, such as usually belongs to little men, pronounced the solemn words:

"In the name of the law, open!"

As solemn as they were, these words produced no more effect than had the semi-authoritative, semi-familiar objurgations of the janitor. No one answered.

M. Blaireau shrugged his shoulders, and turning toward the locksmith, said:

"Go on, you; do your duty!"

The locksmith, who was as tall and thin as the captain was short and fat, without uttering a word, instantly commenced his task.

The crowd of tenants had been promptly ordered back by the police, and kept a short distance in the shadow, forming a sort of circle, in the center of which were the captain, his secretary, and Father Niquelet, whose office gave him the honor.

This little group was lighted up by many lanterns with powerful reflectors, whose rays the police had directed toward the door on which the locksmith was at work.

Above the shoulders of the police, through the gaps which separated them from one another, one might see emerge curious heads, with brilliant eyes, whose bodies disappeared, swallowed up in the dark surroundings; energetic heads, or those ravaged by labor; heads of young or old women, unkempt or covered with bonnets of every description, and handkerchiefs of all colors.

Towering above all these heads was a black and glossy one, covered with thick and matted wool, the eyes of which seemed to throw forth phosphorescent gleams. It was a negro's, and one might have supposed it to have been cut out of a block of jet, so dark and polished was that portion of the skin which was visible.

Still young—he could not have been more than twenty years old—he appeared cut out for a Hercules, and one could easily guess the nervous strength of body and limbs under the sombre hued clothes which covered him, and which were composed of pantaloons and a tight sack coat, buttoned to his chin, both made of dark brown cloth.

His motionless visage did not exhibit those flattened and heavy features that one generally finds among the African race. He had, on the contrary, a straight nose, lips only slightly protruding, and a forehead but very little depressed.

His eyes, possessing an extraordinary animation and a prodigious brilliancy, appeared full of intelligence, and his entire pose expressed the intense interest which he took in the scene which was passing before him.

Had it not been for the preoccupation of the people gathered in this small space he would have attracted the general attention, and his presence would have been the object of a thousand commentaries, not only on account of the color of his skin, but because he was not an inhabitant of that house. He was perfectly unknown there, and no one could have said where he came from, how he had entered, why he was present, when, beyond the tenants of the house governed by Father

Niquelet, not a single stranger had been allowed to cross the threshold of the house.

We may as well say at once that he had entered the house by gliding quickly behind the janitor at the moment when the latter was about going out to warn the police.

Detaching himself from the gossips who were haranguing on the pavement, he had slipped through the half-open door with such rapidity that neither M. Niquelet nor any of the curious assembly had noticed him.

Now, everyone directed his or her looks toward the captain and the locksmith, without bothering himself about the strange companion who had suddenly sprung up, and who preserved absolute silence.

"It is impossible to open it!" said the locksmith, after several useless attempts—"The key is on the inside, and the door is double locked."

"Then, force it!" said M. Blaireau—"And quickly!—Do you hear me—I do not intend to pass the night here—Have you a crowbar?"

"Yes, captain!"

"Then go to work!"

The locksmith dropped a bunch of keys, seized the crowbar, and after placing the point under the door commenced to throw his whole weight and strength upon it.

On his naked and hairy arms (for he had his sleeves rolled up) where the iron and charcoal had left their traces, the muscles and veins stood out like a network of cords, stretched almost to bursting.

Expectation and curiosity, pushed to their last extreme, absorbed the spectators to such a point that the house might have fallen to pieces without anyone dreaming of running away.

The locksmith, after a vigorous effort, straightened himself again. "This door is more solid than I should have believed," said he, passing his black hand over his brow, furrowed with deep wrinkles. "It wants a strong fellow——"

"To do what?" interrupted the captain.

"To lean against the door, so that I can introduce the crowbar. Without that I shall never be able to do anything."

"Who'll volunteer?" said the captain.

"Here—here!" cried several voices, promptly; but before the sound of these voices was heard, the negro whom we have described bruskly pushed aside, with irresistible force, two policemen, and found himself within the circle, near the police captain.

They regarded him with some astonishment, and were going to ask him who he was and what brought him there. He did not give them time. He had already thrown himself against the door, which creaked, bent and partially opened, under the formidable push of one of his shoulders.

The locksmith quickly profited by the circumstance to introduce his iron bar into the interstice between the door and the casing, and added his weight to that of the negro.

For nearly half a minute the lock resisted heroically; then they heard a crackling, at first dull, then sharp; there was a trembling, and, the screws loosening from the wood, the door suddenly fell in, carrying with it the negro and the locksmith, who fell—the first, backward, the second forward, into the middle of the room.

At this sight there was a cry and a movement of the crowd on the landing.

Everyone threw himself forward at the same time, in order to see and to enter.

The police, surprised, were driven back, and one of them even went so far as to upset M. Blaireau, who, furious at the shock he had received, threw himself before the door, which he almost completely filled up, and cried out:

"Thunder and lightning! drive back those animals! Make them leave the stairs! No one shall enter; and the first who resists or stirs, to the jail with him!"

The police, recovered from their surprise, and excited by the voice of their chief, turned once more against the crowd, drove them back, and with the aid

of a few blows, seasoned with strong oaths, had cleared the place in the twinkling of an eye.

The landing was empty.

The spectators were now scrambling up the stairs like a flock of human sheep, crushing one another under foot, elbowing their neighbors only to find themselves wedged in and climbing over one another.

The women cried, the men groaned; but M. Blaireau disturbed himself very little about that. There were no longer on the landing, nor near the door, any persons but himself and his secretary, beside the negro and the locksmith, who had picked themselves up.

M. Blaireau entered the chamber, followed by these three persons and two officers, who, judging that their companions were sufficient to maintain order, disposed themselves to lend assistance, in the present case, to the representatives of justice.

CHAPTER III.

THE ROOM.

IN the center of the room, near a square walnut table, the body of a man lay face downward in a pool of blood.

The skull split open, or rather shattered, left visible a portion of the brain, which was oozing out.

Death must have been instantaneous—which explains why no outcry nor groans had succeeded the shots which had awakened the whole house, and even attracted the attention of two squads of police some distance off.

Near the right hand of the corpse they found a revolver, which the victim had doubtless dropped when he had fallen, stricken by a mortal blow.

On the table was an expiring candle, whose uncertain and flickering rays partially lighted up this scene of death, and gave it, were it possible, a yet more sinister aspect.

Beside the brass candlestick, full of verdigris, there was an open bottle and two glasses half full of a liquid which, from its golden color and odor, one easily recognized as brandy.

Two chairs, facing each other, on opposite sides of the table, and both upset, showed that there had been, only a few moments before, two persons in this chamber.

For one it was useless to seek: he was there, dead, his skull fractured—mute forever!

As to the second, what had become of him?

The room was very small, and, moreover, very high up, in the mansard roof, the slant of which decreased its size at least one-half.

The walls, whitened with lime, did not contain a cupboard in which anyone could have concealed himself.

The furniture consisted of an iron bedstead and a walnut chest of drawers, beside the table and two chairs, the only seats in the room.

There was no fireplace.

On a pine shelf, near the foot of the bed, there was a washbasin and a jug of water for daily needs.

In all, there were two openings to this apartment—the door which they had broken in, and through which the police captain and his companions had entered; and, opposite, a window called a *snuff-box*, whose raised sash let in the damp air of this rainy May evening, which rapidly melted the half-consumed tallow candle.

With a rapid glance the police captain rendered himself familiar with the premises; then, stooping toward the body:

"This is indeed an assassination!" grumbled he, in a softened tone, and which did not conceal an internal feeling of satisfaction. This satisfaction meant: "At least they have not disturbed me for a trifle, a nothing! The affair is serious, it will create a sensation, and I may be able to distinguish myself in clearing it up—which will, perhaps, procure me advancement, or some other good fortune."

"Raise the body, but with precaution, you devil!" added he, addressing one of his inferiors.

The body, being lifted, allowed the face of the old man to be seen, covered with a full beard, which, like his hair, was gray—a face, moreover, of the most vulgar type, with a bestial look, bearing numerous traces of the small-pox, and whose tanned skin resembled old leather.

The features were uninjured; and then only they noticed that the ball, which had shivered the skull, had entered through the top of the head, a little to the rear.

"What a curious wound!" the secretary of the commissioner could not help crying out, although up to then he had not uttered a word, and appeared to tremble before his chief, whom he followed with the submission of a dog accustomed to blows. "One would say that whoever had fired that shot was on the ceiling."

M. Blaireau shrugged his shoulders.

"You always speak foolishly, Monsieur Pourille. There are two wounds. Look, there, one in the middle of the breast! That was the one that knocked him over; the second wound, in the head, was given when he was down, and the top of his skull exposed to the assassin. It was a blow of kindness and of security, in order to insure the death and the silence of the victim—for there is no doubt there were two persons here. The chairs and glasses demonstrate it, if even the nature of the wound in the head did not render it evident."

The assistants listened to M. Blaireau, and gazed at the corpse, without occupying themselves with each other, so that no one remarked the movement of intense surprise which escaped the negro, when the face of the victim was brought into full light, and one could distinguish the features.

"Is he indeed dead?" at last asked M. Niquelet, who appeared absolutely stupefied at this spectacle.

"*Parbleu!*" replied the police captain; "the skull is crushed! Besides, I sent for a surgeon before I start-

ed; he will be here instantly, and will commence his examination. Meanwhile, deposit the body on the bed, without deranging anything, and let us proceed with order."

The two policemen cautiously lifted the corpse and placed it on the bed, taking the greatest possible care to preserve the attitude in which they had found it.

"The assassin could only have escaped by the window," continued M. Blaireau, "since the door was fastened inside, and as this garret presents no other exit."

He approached the window, and wished to look out, but the shortness of his figure prevented him from seeing anything.

The secretary brought him one of the chairs, on which he mounted.

"Oh—oh!" said he, "it rains hard—fit weather for a dog! Here is a terribly steep roof, where only a cat could walk without danger."

"He has followed the gutter," observed one of the officers.

"Doubtless; but where can that have conducted him? The night is as hot as an oven!"

"Is it possible for one to gain the neighboring house by this way?" added he, turning toward the janitor.

"Oh, yes, captain," replied the latter; "that is, if one could hold himself there without falling. There are half a score of houses which touch each other."

"The whole block, indeed," said one of the policemen. "I know the neighborhood well; I am always on duty hereabouts."

"That is it; and entering some garret, one could gain a stairway and escape, either by Oberkampf street, Moret street, or the Belleville boulevard. The devil! Run below immediately with your comrade, collect all the police you can find, and go and warn the janitors of the houses in question. If we arrive in time he is taken as in a mouse-trap. Let us be quick —be off!"

The two police officers hastened out of the apartment, and the sound of their heavy boots was heard on

the stairs, which they descended on the run, after overturning the tenants, still gathered at the entrance of the corridor.

One of the officers had deposited his lantern on the table.

"Pass me that lantern," ordered M. Blaireau, addressing his secretary. "If the assassin has escaped this way he must have left some trace of his passage."

The secretary hastened to obey this order, while the janitor, still very pale, exchanged a few words, in a low tone, with the locksmith.

As to the negro, he kept apart, striving to make himself small, which was impossible, and endeavoring to pass unnoticed, which was easy amid the general preoccupation.

His brilliant eyes went without cessation from the face of the dead to the window occupied by the police captain with an extraordinary rapidity, without one's being able to divine what were the sentiments which agitated his brain.

All one could be certain of was that he took a very great interest in all this scene, and particularly in the words and acts of the police captain.

M. Blaireau was in possession of the lantern, whose powerful reflection sent to a great distance a bright and clear light, and methodically turned it about him.

All at once he uttered an exclamation.

The others approached M. Blaireau except the negro, who did not stir a step, contenting himself with quickly bending forward his shiny and wooly head.

"Oh—oh!" said M. Blaireau. "There is no doubt of it, the assassin has made off by the roofs. Here is quite a long track visible as if a foot had slipped—— Look, here, M. Pourille."

And the captain drew a little to one side to permit his subordinate, who was sufficiently tall, to pass his head through the aperture.

"Perfectly plain, sir," said the secretary, almost instantly, in an obsequious tone. "But what is that which shines so?"

"Whereabouts?"

"On the left, two or three yards off, in the gutter."

"Indeed, stop a moment!—One would call it a piece of glass or metal."

"It is the chamber of a revolver," replied M. Blaireau's secretary, "I can see it plainly."

"So can I!" dryly responded the captain, who had seen it a little later, and who did not like to acknowledge that M. Pourille had seen it first. "The rogue has gone to the left, and has lost his weapon. It will be necessary to recover this weapon—and even to follow the trail as far as possible. He is perhaps concealed behind some chimney. It will require an adroit, vigorous and resolute man—and my officers are gone——"

"Oh! I don't know whether your officers would run the risk of following that way. There are nine chances out of ten of falling to the pavement. It would require a carpenter or a roofer."

"We know, Monsieur Pourille, that you are incapable of doing it," dryly interrupted the captain. "Nevertheless some one must go."

"Me, massa!" said a slightly lisping voice.

Everybody turned around with surprise.

The negro had advanced to the center of the room, and it was he who had spoken.

"Who are you? What are you?" demanded the police captain, looking at him as if he saw the negro for the first time, and, in fact, he had forgotten him.

"Me go on roof to get back pistol—find murderer."

"Who are you? What are you doing here?"

"Me servant to beautiful lady—came here by chance to see."

"What is your name?"

"Mono."

"And you are a domestic?" continued M. Blaireau, perceiving that the brown clothes of the negro had white metal buttons, that his pantaloons had a white band down the seam of each leg, and the facings of his short coat were of silver lace.

"Yes, massa."

"Whose?"

"Madame de Los Rias'."

"Where does she live?"

"Near the Botanical Garden."

"Very good. We will see about that later. And you say that you would dare venture yourself on the roof, in pursuit of the assassin?"

"Yes, massa."

"The dog has a firm and resolute air," grumbled the captain, to himself. "Very well, go ahead," added he, aloud. "It is important not to lose a minute. Only be careful, for the rascal, if you run across him, will defend himself."

"Me armed," replied the negro, drawing from his pocket one of those formidable knives used in Spain and South America, and which they call a *navaja.*

He rapidly opened it, placed it between his teeth, threw off his coat, under which he wore nothing but a coarse shirt of unbleached domestic, and took off his shoes, out of which came his enormous black feet, with long toes as supple as fingers.

"Me ready!" said he.

"That is good. You shall receive a recompense—if you succeed."

The captain got down from the chair.

The negro bounded upon the window-sill, with a cat's suppleness, and his body disappeared in the outer darkness.

"You no light my way," said he, putting his head back through the window. "Light point me out, and make me uneasy."

"He is right," said M. Blaireau. "Monsieur Pourille, take away the lantern."

Nevertheless the police captain remained at the window, once more hoisted on the chair, and followed with his eyes in the darkness the white shirt, which allowed him to divine Mono's (since that was his name) course.

The negro slowly glided down the roof until his feet touched the gutter. Then he noiselessly advanced, his body glued to the coping of the house, stretching

himself out like a serpent, and without producing the slightest noise.

He had directed his steps toward the left.

All at once he arrested his steps, bent down, tottered, and for a moment appeared to overhang the chasm beneath.

"Ah, poor devil! he is going to fall," murmured the representative of authority. "The animal gives me the vertigo. But no—there, he has recovered himself."

In fact, the negro was standing upright and waving his hand.

"Ah! very good! He is showing that he has found the revolver. He is a rugged fellow."

Just then the arrival of two new personages in the apartment forced the captain to quit his post of observation.

These new arrivals were the physician sent for to examine into the nature of the wounds and the state of the body, and a chief of the detectives, who, having learned that a murder had been committed, hastened of his own accord to put himself at the disposition of M. Blaireau for the preliminary investigation.

"Monsieur Pourille," said M. Blaireau, descending from his chair, "keep watch at the window. We are about to pursue our investigations."

CHAPTER IV.

BLAIREAU WORRIES NIQUELET.

THE sight of this detective caused the police captain no pleasure, and even inspired him with a certain internal irritation.

M. Blaireau had hoped to distinguish himself, as we have said, and to play the principal part in the great affair which had fallen to him from the skies; now the arrival of *M. Percinet*—the name by which the detective was generally designated, although it was not his real one—deranged all his plans and upset all his hopes.

Percinet was highly appreciated at head-quarters, and passed for an able and shrewd man.

Arriving at the beginning he was going to master the situation, govern it and appropriate all the benefits, to the detriment of M. Blaireau, whom he did not like, on account of former circumstances and old rivalries.

Nevertheless the police captain had to put a good face on bad fortune, and forced himself to conceal his spite under the least aggressive form compatible with his splenetic temperament.

"Ah! you here, Monsieur Percinet?" he said, showing his teeth, under the pretext of smiling. "You have the scent of a hound. The odor of game attracts you."

"I was passing in the neighborhood," replied the detective—a brown, thin little man, with a flashing eye and the face of a weasel, who concealed great muscular strength under a frail aspect. "One of your men has related the details of the affair to me, and I have hastened to give you a surprise."

"The principal part is done, Monsieur Percinet."

And he explained in a few words what had passed, and the orders he had given.

"Yes—yes, I know," said Percinet. "Before coming up I ascertained that your men were watching at the doors of all the surrounding houses, after having warned the janitors. I took it upon myself to make them also guard the extremities of each street, and no one can pass until after having submitted to a serious examination. If the assassin has not had time to escape before your arrival he cannot now escape. As to the individual who ran on the roof on the other's trail I augur nothing good."

"Why is that?"

"You do not know? That is perhaps the accomplice."

M. Blaireau became very red.

"An accomplice—that negro—the lackey of a great lady."

"Whom you have not seen—nor I either! Well—well! We will clear that up—anyhow he is hemmed in like the other one, and must explain himself soon."

Then, stooping toward the captain, he added, in a lower tone:

"Meanwhile send away the locksmith. The fewer there are about during the preliminary examination the better."

The observation was just, and M. Blaireau hastened to comply with the suggestion by sending off the workman, who was greatly discomfited at finding that his curiosity would have to learn patience, and that he would now know nothing more than the common herd.

After he had gone, and while the physician was attentively examining the body, the two police officers, without disturbing themselves in regard to the presence of the janitor, who might possibly be able to give them some information, devoted themselves to a summary investigation, which the desire of following the assassin's trail had hitherto caused to be neglected.

Here is the result of their first efforts:

First. It was established that robbery had not been the motive of the crime.

None of the furniture bore the slightest trace of having been broken open.

Nothing had been disturbed in the small chamber, which was evidently kept with remarkable order and cleanliness.

Besides, everything in it denoted poverty, and it is not in the garrets of six-story tenement houses that a thief amuses himself by losing his time, or in risking his head by becoming a murderer.

The idea of robbery set aside, there remained that of a quarrel; but a quarrel, above all, one between individuals not belonging, according to probabilities, to the higher classes of society, should have been noisy, and it appeared certain that nothing had been heard before the sound of the fire-arms.

On the other hand, it is a rare thing in Paris for two people seated at the same table in a private house to be both armed with revolvers.

France is not America; and those who carry revolvers about their persons are there the exception.

Was this, then, a case of vengeance?

Perhaps. Nevertheless, it did not appear as if there had been any struggle, properly speaking. The crime must have been committed suddenly and with great rapidity, as if between persons who had an equal interest in finishing it quickly and without attracting attention. They had drank together, as was proven by the uncorked bottle and the two half-filled glasses. They had overturned their chairs, but the latter had remained where they had fallen.

The victim's chair must have fallen when he had been hit by the first or the second ball, which had knocked him over; the assassin's when he arose to fire or to escape.

What stood forth plainest of all the circumstances of the affair was that the two men knew each other and were friends, or, at least, comrades.

Who had fired first?

Here the physician left no doubt. It was the victim.

The revolver picked up in the room, and which incontestably belonged to him, for the wounds were made by balls belonging to a weapon of larger caliber, had been discharged once only, and they saw the mark made by its bullet on the wall opposite the door, near the snuff-box window.

The ball had penetrated to some depth.

Let us say that the victim had fired first.

Indeed, the wound in the breast, which had preceded that in the head, was equally mortal, having gone through the heart, and the unfortunate receiver of it must have been destroyed by the first shot.

As M. Blaireau said, the second wound was only an excess of precaution.

Thus were explained the three successive shots, at irregular intervals.

Both men had, in the first place, fired almost together; then the assassin had approached the body, extended at his feet, and, with the muzzle of his pistol almost touching it, had discharged a last shot.

But who was the victim, exactly?

There, commenced the *role* of the janitor, Niquelet; and the police captain began to interrogate him with his customary brutality, which he did not dare to show toward the detective, Percinet, and so he revenged himself upon the janitor:

"How did this man call himself?" he demanded.

"Loriot."

"Had he no other name?"

"Peter. But in the house they called him, as a sort of pleasantry, godfather."

"What did he do?"

"He said that he would be rich in a short while—that he was about to come into a large sum."

"Where? How?"

"Ah! I do not know! He was mysterious, spoke little, went out almost all day, and often returned late."

"And to-day?"

"He returned sooner than usual, singing in a gay manner."

"Did he go into society?"

"Outside, I don't know."

"But here?"

"Here? No, never."

"Nevertheless, this evening——"

"On my word, captain—you see me completely upset—I have not seen anyone come up to his room!"

"That is impossible! You well know that someone came——"

"That is plain. But I swear to you—perhaps a dozen people have called this evening, but not one has asked for M. Loriot!"

"It seems to me that you take fine care of your house; and, if I was the proprietor, I should send you about your business no later than to-morrow morning——"

"But, captain——"

"That is enough! You are a drunkard or an idiot! You do not look after the house! The assassin has not fallen from heaven! He entered by the door—he mounted the stairs! We will examine into this subject thoroughly!"

Father Niquelet, hearing this flood of menacing words, commenced waddling on his two legs, one of which was much shorter than the other, with that terror which the police inspire in poor devils.

"How long has Loriot lived here?" went on M. Blaireau, more and more roughly.

"For three weeks."

"Where did he come from?"

"I know nothing about it."

"How, animal! you know nothing about it? If I asked you, where is the wine merchant's, you would know, wouldn't you? Did you not ask for references? Haven't you seen his papers? Come, answer, instead of regarding me with such a besotted air."

"But, captain, he paid in advance. He brought new furniture. It is my duty to see that the proprietor receives his rents regularly, and that there is no

trouble made in the house—the rest is no concern of mine."

"So, then, this is all the information you can furnish —"

"*Dame!* Ah! I now recall—"

"What?"

"He has spoken of traveling in the islands, in India, or America, I don't know just exactly which—but it was far off—and that he found it warmer there than here."

"That helps us some. But there ought to be papers, something, no matter what, to tell us who this person was."

The captain and the detective then commenced a search, which, minute as it was, it did not take them long to finish.

The room was small; the furniture scanty. One could see that it had been bought but a short time before, and that the purchaser had contented himself with what was only absolutely necessary.

There was nothing to examine but the table and the bureau, as they were the only pieces of furniture which contained drawers.

That of the table, which had no lock, contained some old crusts of bread, three iron covers, and a knife of English manufacture.

The bureau drawers were almost empty. In all they found two unmarked shirts, some handkerchiefs, socks, filthy and much used, an old coat—but not a paper—not an object by which one could establish an identity—nothing that spoke of the past, nor that revealed any habits.

They also found some small change in an old net purse—about fifteen francs. And that was all.

"The devil!—the devil!" grumbled M. Blaireau. "This is complicated!"

"We can interrogate the furniture dealer," tranquilly observed the detective, Percinet. "He can easily be found."

While M. Blaireau read over the official report, prepared by his secretary, the detective had approached

the corpse, and attentively considered his face and his hairy chest, laid bare by the physician.

"Hum!" said Percinet. "There is a head which tells me nothing good. It is neither the head of a workman nor of an honest man."

He stooped down, raised the sleeve of the right arm, and brought to light many bluish tattooings.

These represented a death's head, beneath a heart pierced by a knife, besides a date—"1820."

"Here is something which may guide us!" cried the detective, standing erect once more. "We must have our men and spies, and, above all, our old convicts, see this body. Either I am very much deceived or here is an old acquaintance, who must have passed, some time or other, through the hands of the police."

"The fact is," said the physician, "that he is not handsome, and that his face reveals a life agitated by all the violent and wicked passions."

"Yes," said M. Percinet, slowly rubbing his hands together, "he has rather the head of a murderer than of one murdered."

CHAPTER V.

FROM ONE GARRET TO ANOTHER.

WHILE the police captain and the detective were engaged in their investigations, in the company of the physician and the janitor, the negro continued his daring course upon the roofs in search of the murderer.

M. Blaireau had not deceived himself when he thought he saw the negro recover the revolver and wave it over his head to show that he had it.

This done, Mono had placed the pistol in his pantaloons-pocket, and had continued, through the obscurity and rain, to silently creep along, with a calculated slowness that was not without resolution, without quitting the moist edge of the gutter, and clinging with

his hands to the very smallest projections which the slippery roof offered him.

The police captain's secretary had simply expressed the truth in declaring that none of the police at his chief's disposal would have dared on such a night to risk himself on such a perilous errand, where there were at least nine chances in ten of meeting a frightful death by falling from the roof to the pavement below.

Only a roofer or a carpenter, accustomed to that kind of work, would have been able to run the risk; and, moreover, even he would have required daylight, ropes and ladders, in order to be certain of his progress and his security; above all in such wet weather, which increased the danger tenfold.

But our negro advanced with extraordinary audacity and agility, seeming to see in the dark, and clinging stoutly with his hands and bare feet—with his long, supple and nervous toes, which procured for him the same advantages possessed by cats.

He apparently possessed the faculty of being four-handed, and also that certainty of movement which belongs only to the savage.

After having gone a short distance farther, he found himself at the corner of the house, which he turned, and completely disappeared behind a chimney, which was the boundary of the neighboring property.

Arrived there, he stopped for a few seconds, and appeared to look about, in order to find out exactly where he was, as far as the darkness would permit.

At that moment, crouched against the chimney, to which he firmly and silently held on, his body was so completely confounded with the black wall that it would have been impossible for the sharpest eyes to have suspected his presence. But this immobility did not last. Stooping, with infinite precaution, without loosening the hold which preserved his equilibrium, he slowly bent down to the roof, against which he placed his ear, and appeared to listen.

He remained thus for nearly two minutes, and then

arose to his knees, shaking his woolly head with a dissatisfied air.

He had evidently heard nothing.

Then he extended one of his hands, passing it with extreme rapidity and minuteness in every direction.

"He ought to have passed this way," murmured he between his white teeth; "but where has he turned to?—to the right?—to the left? Has he remounted the roof?—has he continued to follow the gutter?"

To remount the roof was possible at this spot, where were a lot of chimney pots.

All at once the negro trembled; his hand had felt where a tile was missing from its regular place; it had been thrust aside, as if by a vigorous downward pressure.

At the same time his fingers had seized some fragments of brick, which had fallen from the chimney slightly above the place where he was standing.

He uttered a sort of low and guttural grunt, which seemed to express satisfaction, and, no longer hesitating, he began, in his turn, to climb the roof, so as to raise himself to the top, and thus gain the opposite side of the house.

Having reached the edge he lay on his stomach and let himself glide down, feet foremost, but still retaining his hold on the chimney.

This maneuver had something frightful about it, for he thus directed himself toward the street below, to which his back was turned; but the negro evidently knew neither vertigo nor nervousness, which so greatly increase the danger in such cases.

He did not hurry himself, each fraction of an inch below him was carefully felt, verified, and *listened to*, if one can so call it, by his feet, which seemed endowed with an unheard of tact and *intelligence*.

Finally he encountered the opposite edge of the new house, which faced the Belleville Boulevard, and there he stopped.

At a great depth beneath him he perceived the gaslights, and a dull noise, which ascended from below, announced that some curious people were still sta-

tioned at the corner of the street and the boulevard, although kept at a distance by the police, who guarded the house-doors and the extremities of each of the streets forming the square, thus isolating the theater of the crime.

His eager eyes looked below for a moment, while his ear sought to analyze the character and the sense of the confused sounds which came up to him; then he brought his eyes to bear on the spot he occupied, and once again endeavored to ascertain his whereabouts.

If he turned to the left he must necessarily return by another route to the house he had just quitted.

According to all probabilities the assassin should have tried to escape from there. Therefore, he must turn to the right, and that was what the negro resolutely did.

Up to the present he had found no garret window opening on the roof.

Now, on the contrary, he saw many, standing out in profile against the sombre sky.

He continued on his way, redoubling his efforts to make no noise which could give warning of his approach, even holding his breath as an extra and excessive precaution.

In this manner he arrived at the first window and stopped, inspecting it slowly.

This window was dark and closed. He passed his hands over the glass, then placed his ear against it, interrogating all the surroundings with his eyes and fingers, and appeared convinced that he whom he pursued had not passed through there.

Indeed, admitting that the assassin had reclosed the window after having entered the garret or loft to which it gave light, he must have commenced by opening it; to do that he would have to break at least one pane. Now the glass was intact, and nothing revealed to the practiced eyes of the African the passage of a man through this place.

He therefore proceeded on his way, inspecting with the same care and lack of success, three other garret-

windows, and two snuff-box windows which he encountered on his route.

This did not appear to discourage him, and, without tiring, he turned a second corner which brought him toward Oberkampf street.

There he suddenly stopped.

He perceived a light, the first since he commenced his perilous travels, which pierced the darkness and signalled to him from afar some kind of an opening.

This light was extremely pale, slightly intermittent, and appeared ready to go out at any moment.

In place of hastening his steps, the negro now slackened them, and stole along slowly and silently, like a hunting-dog who had struck the trail and scented the game.

In this way he approached the lighted window, and, when he was close to it, he once again applied his ear to the roof and listened a long time; then, doubtless reassured by the silence, he little by little raised himself so that his head was on a level with the window, through which he threw a quick and ardent glance.

Then he uttered, for a second time, a low and guttural grunt, which seemed habitual to him in decisive moments, and, raising himself with his hands, he soon stood on the sill of the window, through which he leaped with one bound.

He found himself in a garret-room, like the one in which the crime had been committed, and equally small.

The pale, intermittent light which had attracted him hither proceeded from a lighted wax-candle, which had fallen on the floor, and whose expiring flame, although threatening to go out, had, from the current of air established between the window and a half-open door opposite, commenced to burn the part of the floor where it lay.

The whole chamber was in extreme disorder.

It was evident that there had been here, only a few moments before, a violent struggle.

A table, covered with papers, had been overturned,

carrying with it the chair, which was lying near the candle.

Wet tracks, reproducing the form of a large foot covered with mud, like the negro's naked feet, spread out on the floor, going from the window toward the door, then returning toward the center of the little apartment, where there had been much stamping of feet, as if in a struggle between two persons.

Sheets of music, covered with quavers and semi-quavers, were scattered here and there; but, fortunately, they had not fallen near the candle or they would have caught fire, which would have probably extended to the entire room.

Besides the table, chair, some white wooden shelves encumbered with music-books, and a piano placed against the wall to the left, if one entered by the window, there was no other furniture, notably no bed.

It was evidently a working-room, where no one came but at certain hours, and for certain special occupations; and he who occupied it, at these moments, could not be very well off, judging from the quality and the simplicity of the furniture more than from the amount.

The negro, after having assured himself that the room was empty, entered it, as we have said.

His first care was to immediately pick up the candle and inspect his surroundings, particularly the imprint of the naked feet.

To do this he stooped toward the floor, taking care not to mix his own footsteps with those which preceded them, and he quickly thrust aside the sheets of music which covered some of them.

In displacing a sheet, he all at once uncovered a weapon—a knife which had fallen and was abandoned there, in the haste of sudden flight.

He threw himself upon this weapon, gazed at it and uttered his habitual grunt.

There was no doubt that he had made an important discovery.

The weapon which he had picked up was, indeed,

like the open one he held between his teeth, which during his long and dangerous trip upon the roof, he had never allowed to escape.

It was a Spanish knife, a *navaja.*

"There is no doubt of it," he murmured in excellent French, without using the childish dialect customary with most blacks, and which he had employed before the police captain. "He entered here, and found a man, or was surprised by one. There was a struggle between them—still, this knife bears no trace of blood—he was unable to see it—or had not time—or he dared not—but where has he gone?"

He silently reflected for a moment.

"Could he have been arrested by the neighbors? No—the whole house would be in a state of excitement, and it is perfectly calm, mute—no one appears to suspect——"

He had approached the door, which opened on a long corridor, full of other doors, evidently opening into garrets, which led to the stairs.

He cautiously entered this corridor, holding the candle in his hand, after having hidden the denunciatory weapon in his pocket.

The wet footsteps were also found here, but less marked, the feet having become drier.

At a short distance from the door a white object attracted his attention—it was a woman's cuff.

He quickly seized it, looked at it, and then concealed it as he had the knife, saying:

"Oh—oh! a woman has come upon the scene—this has something of the incomprehensible about it."

He re-entered the chamber, replaced the candle on the floor, but upright this time, then went out again, gained the stairway and descended it with the step of a wolf, without making a single step creak.

Reaching the floor beneath he stopped, his head stretched forward, as if he had heard something unusual.

It must have been so, for, in the darkness, guided only by this noise, imperceptible to any other than himself, he insensibly approached a door which he

could not see, but which he recognized by the touch, and he placed his ear against the key-hole.

There he heard, without being able to distinguish the words, several people speaking, with great caution, in a back room, doubtless after having taken care to close one or two communicating doors within the apartment.

Still he was perfectly certain that a woman was sobbing, and a loud voice, quickly hushed, made him tremble.

"He is there!" murmured he; "but who are these who occupy this apartment, and who conceal him? I will know."

He was going to listen again, when a violent noise came up from the ground floor, at the same time that a bright gleam threw its light across the balusters of the stairs.

The front door of the house was open, and many persons had entered with lanterns.

The negro bent over the railing and looked.

"Oh—oh!" said he, "the police! They are about to make a search!"

After a moment's hesitation, he ascended the stairs, quickly regained the room in the garret, and noiselessly entered it.

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH GASTON LAPIERRE PASSES FROM THE GREATEST UNEASINESS TO THE GREATEST SURPRISE.

THE negro had not deceived himself.

It was really, in fact, the police who had entered, in the shape of the stout and cross M. Blaireau, the angular Percinet, and many solid fellows, dressed in police uniform.

The negro having taken nearly three-quarters of an hour to gain the house in Oberkampf street, where we have accompanied him, the police captain had had time to finish the summary inquest reported by us in a preceding chapter, and not seeing return his singular fellow laborer, who had offered himself to seek the assassin on the roofs by which he must have escaped, the captain had commenced visiting the houses forming the block, in the hope of capturing the criminal, if he had succeeded in concealing himself in some garret.

"If we do not find him," said Percinet, "which, after all, is possible, for he may have entered one of the neighboring houses before the alarm was given and watchfulness established, we will still find some indication of his passage. Perhaps he may have met someone on the stairs who let him pass without mistrust, but who can give us a description of him."

What the detective did not add aloud, for fear of deeply wounding M. Blaireau, was that he was distrustful of this negro, who had come so opportunely, and whom he wanted to meet as soon as possible, in order to question him and to assure himself of his identity.

The two representatives of justice had already visited many of the neighboring houses, questioning the

janitors and tenants, making them open the garrets and lofts under the roofs, in order to discover the murderer, if he had sought refuge in any of them, but all in vain.

He whom they pursued was not there.

They had neither seen nor heard anything of him.

They now visited in its turn the house in Oberkampf street.

"For two hours," said the janitor, "no one has passed my room, nor asked me to open the front door."

"Consequently if he has entered he has not gone out," answered the police captain.

"Have the lofts or garrets an opening on the roof?" demanded Percinet.

"Certainly, sir, many of them."

"Then a careful search must be made among them."

"I have duplicate keys of the garrets."

"No matter," replied the detective; "the tenants must be asked for theirs, which will permit us to see and question them. One never knows what may happen. One of these may doubtless be able to give us useful information."

"Are you sure of your tenants?" bruskly interrupted the police captain. "Do you know them well?"

"Oh, perfectly," replied the janitor, holding up his head with dignity. "This is an honest and quiet house. I would not put up with a worthless individual or doubtful people. This is not like the houses on either side, full of beggars and workmen. Here we only have people of means."

"Who have lived here for some time?"

"The latest came three years since," proudly replied the janitor, "and never one minute late with their rent. On the eighth and fifteenth, at midday, I present the bills, and within a half hour everything is paid."

With this information the police commenced their ascent.

The janitor knocked at the doors. The police captain asked those who answered if they had heard or

remarked nothing unusual during the evening; begged that they would please confide to him the keys of their garrets, or lofts, or cellars; for the assassin might have been able to gain admittance to the latter, in place of remaining in some corner of a garret, where he could wait for daylight before attempting to escape, without attracting attention, through the street door.

In this way the little troop arrived at the fifth floor, and the janitor raised the knocker of a door on which was a small brass plate, bearing these words:

"MADAME LAPIERRE,

"DRESSMAKER."

Although the noise occasioned by the arrival of the police must have aroused everyone, the janitor had to knock three times, and give several vigorous blows on the door with his fist, in order to obtain a response.

"They are very deaf in there," grumbled M. Blaireau.

"Who is there?" finally said a man's voice from within.

"It is I, Monsieur Lapierre; I, the janitor!"

"What do you wish?"

"Open the door."

"I am in bed."

"The police captain wishes to speak with you."

At these words they heard a smothered exclamation, proceeding from another person, a woman, doubtless.

"I say, do you hear? hurry up!" added M. Blaireau, in his gruff voice, rudely and impatiently. "I think that we are not to sleep on the landing."

The door opened, and they saw a young man—he might have been anywhere from twenty to twenty-five years of age—dressed from head to foot, which appeared very strange in one who had just said he had been in bed, and extremely pale, which showed off his dark hair and black eyes all the more.

He wore a fine mustache, equally black, and tried with difficulty to restrain a visible trembling.

"The police!" stammered he; "what do they want with me?"

"Ah! gracious!" cried the janitor, smiling, "you have an upset look. Re-assure yourself, Monsieur Lapierre, it is not you whom they want. They do not come to arrest you. They only wish to ask of you some information and the key of your work-room, above."

The young man's lively emotion, his evident air of terror, were not displeasing to Captain Blaireau. It was respect for his office, consequently for himself. He liked to make people tremble. It flattered him and raised him in his own eyes; a frequent feeling with inferior natures, who can only rise when others kneel before them.

"Yes—yes, re-assure yourself!" repeated the police captain, in a surly, but not brutal tone; "a murder has been committed in a neighboring house. It is supposed the assassin escaped by the roof, and we are visiting all the houses in which he could have taken refuge."

The young man appeared anything but reassured; on the contrary, he became still paler, if such a thing was possible.

"So, then, you have come to make a search?" he replied, in a choking voice.

"We have come, in the first place, to ask if you have heard nothing; if you have seen no strange person in the house," interrupted the captain, who did not like to be himself interrogated.

"No, captain," said, suddenly and resolutely, a voice behind the young man; and, at the same time, a woman of at least fifty years of age came out of the shadows which had up to then concealed her.

"Good evening, Madame Lapierre!" said the janitor. "Many excuses for disturbing you at such an hour."

This woman—very neatly, but very simply clad in a close-fitting black dress, without any ornament save a white collar and plain linen cuffs, or rather a cuff, for one was missing—had gray hair, a sad and distinguished air, and so strongly resembled the young man who had opened the door that, even without

hearing her name, one would have known that she was his mother.

"Everywhere the same response!" murmured M. Blaireau."

"Have these persons a garret or loft room, or a cellar?" asked Percinet.

"Cellar and garret, yes—yes," replied the janitor.

"Will you give us the keys?" said the captain.

"I will go and look for the cellar key," said the mother, eagerly; "it is in the kitchen."

And she disappeared and returned, as if by enchantment, like one who did not wish to keep them waiting.

"As to the garret key, you have it, Monsieur Lapierre, have you not?" said the janitor.

"Yes," said the young man, feeling in his pockets with a reluctance he was unable to conceal—"that is to say, no. I believe I left it in the door."

"That is very imprudent!" dryly replied M. Blaireau. "Let us go up. We will visit this room first, the lofts afterwards, and finish with the cellars. Show us the way," added he, addressing the janitor.

The mother and son exchanged a rapid glance.

"I will accompany you," all at once said the latter. And, like a man who has taken his resolution, he went up the first.

The key was really in the door, which was closed.

The young man seized it, opened it with a sort of feverish violence, and threw himself, so to speak, into the room, followed by his companions.

But, scarcely entered, he remained as if glued to one place, and uttered a cry of surprise.

The room which we saw, when the negro entered it, in complete disorder and showing every indication of a violent struggle, was perfectly arranged, and breathed nothing but calmness and innocence.

The table had been raised, and the chair also. The sheets of music were arranged with regularity. The candle, placed on one corner of the table, was burning peacefully; the floor, perfectly clean, preserved no traces of footsteps and seemed to have been carefully swept or wiped off within a short period—which did

honor to the young man's orderly taste; the window was not fastened, but only pushed to.

M. Lapierre regarded all this with an air of inexpressible astonishment.

"Bless me!" cried the janitor, "you have forgotten to extinguish your light before going down stairs."

"So I did!" said the young man, appearing to recover some of his coolness. "And that was what surprised me, just now, as I entered."

"You are a musician, monsieur—monsieur ——."

"Lapierre," said the tenant.

"Monsieur Lapierre," pursued the captain; "and here is where you work?"

"Yes, sir."

Percinet inspected the apartment.

He went up to the window, ascertained that it was fastened, opened it suddenly, leaned out, studied for a moment what he could see of the roof, and then returned toward the captain.

"Well?" said the latter.

"Nothing! The assassin could have entered here easily; but the light must have frightened him. I see no on the floor, especially as the roof is wet. The neighboring garrets and the cellars must be visited."

The young man uttered a sigh of relief.

"Who has been here and arranged the room?" thought he.

"You have no more need of me?" he demanded of the police captain.

"No, sir; you can return to your rooms. The janitor will return your cellar key."

M. Lapierre did not need to be told twice, and hastened to regain his lodgings, at the door of which his mother awaited him!

CHAPTER VII.

MONO'S MISTRESS.

THE young negro, Mono, had declared that he was a servant of Madame de Los Rias', who lived near the Botanical Garden.

Indeed, Madame de Los Rias did inhabit, on Cuvier street, a small apartment on the second floor, whose windows opened on the great trees and the lawns which enlivened and sweetened that retired corner of old Paris.

The apartment occupied by this lady was small, as we have said, but it was elegantly and coquettishly furnished, although without that luxury which indicates a large fortune.

She lived there alone, having for her only servants the negro, whom we already know, and a waiting-maid, very young, and of a strange type, who answered to the name of Carmencita, an affectionate or familiar diminutive, according to circumstances, of Carmen.

The servants slept in the same suite of rooms as their mistress. There were six rooms besides the kitchen—two for the servants, madame's bed-chamber, the dining-room, a sufficiently-large drawing-room, and a private *boudoir*, where the mistress of the house passed most of her days, going out little, and receiving no one.

We find her there the morning after the events reported in the preceding chapter, extended in an easy-chair, and smoking a cigarette of Turkish tobacco.

Madame de Los Rias had possessed a striking and original beauty, and, although she was not in her first youth, she had not yet lost it, but only that brilliancy

of spring and freshness of dawn which passes away with the morning of life.

To look at her, she appeared but thirty, and we might so call her, a woman never being older than she looks; but truth compels us to say that she was five years older than that.

She was not very large; and she was evidently a Spaniard, for she had the long black eyes of that race, velvety, and slit like an almond, ebony eyebrows, of rounded shape, and teeth like pearls, and feet and hands extrordinarily small and delicate.

Her dark complexion; her low, heavy forehead; her rather short nose, with extremely sensitive nostrils; her coral lips, declining at the corners, and her chin, slightly prominent and firmly designed, gave a mixture of energy, and even hardness, amid which a lightning glance revealed the violence of internal passions.

She had, also, the round and supple figure, well-developed, and full neck and shoulders, which the Spanish women cover with a brilliant satin corsage, molded exactly to suit the lines of the body.

At the moment when we first see Dolores, it is about ten o'clock; she wears a long white muslin wrapper trimmed with lace, with short and boldly sloping sleeves, which leave visible her firm and round arms—an admirable privilege of women, when exaggerated stoutness has not yet changed Hogarth's line of beauty.

Her beautiful arms, with small wrists ornamented with heavy gold bracelets, and sloping shoulders would have made an artist enthusiastic; also her foot, like a child's, playing in a heelless slipper, and her ankles clad in silk stockings, which one could see below her wrapper partly raised by the careless and nonchalant posture in which she was lying in the easy chair.

Her black hair, partly undone, fell in ringlets around her head, without other ornament than a purple flower, a rare thing in Paris at that season.

She exhibited sufficient languor in her pose to show that she was a Creole, even if she had not, on renting the apartment, declared to the janitor of the house

that her name was Dolores de Los Rias; that she was born at Buenos-Ayres; and that she had come from that city to attend to some business affairs.

As, moreover, she appeared, if not rich, at least comfortably off; as she had two servants; made no debts; showed herself but little; lived properly, tranquilly and quietly, and appeared accustomed to the larger life of the great world, they only spoke of her in the neighborhood with kindness; and the curiosity excited by the strange appearance and the characteristic types of these three persons changed to complacent liking.

For the rest, she was generous toward the janitor; the waiting-maid and the negro were inexhaustible in their praises of their mistress; and it needed no more than this to assure the consideration of those around her.

Still, on this particular morning, Madame de Los Rias, whom we will for the sake of convenience call Dolores, in spite of the languid indolence of her pose and the clouds of white smoke which proceeded from her cigarette at long and regular intervals, seemed not exactly agitated, but much preoccupied and very uneasy.

Her black eyebrows each instant came closer together and the curvature of her lips, declining toward the corners, became more and more marked.

"Carmencita!" she said, suddenly, with that slightly guttural accent peculiar to her country-people, and raising herself on one of her elbows.

The waiting-maid immediately entered.

She was a very young girl, who would have been considered still a child had she belonged to our slowly developing races of the temperate zone, for she was not more than fourteen years old, although she had already the form of a woman.

At the first glance one recognized a *half-breed;* in her veins flowed Indian and Spanish blood, which is not at all a rare thing in South America, where the conquerors have amalgamated with the conquered.

She had a tawny skin, deep black eyes, slightly

savage, like those of a young wolf, prominent cheek-bones, full cheeks, long chin, and the lower part of the face strongly developed, with thick, but handsome, red lips, which, when open, showed teeth white, sharp-pointed and close together.

Her limbs were long and slender, her figure fine, and her shoulders straight. In short, taken altogether, she was original and seductive.

"Did madame call me?" said she, in a sweet voice, although the guttural accent was more marked in her than in her mistress.

"Yes; what time is it?"

"Just ten o'clock."

Dolores made an impatient gesture.

"And Mono has not returned?"

"No, madame."

"It is incredible! What can have become of him?" she murmured, in a tone in which uneasiness was evidently turning into anger.

"No misfortune, I hope," replied the little servant, responding rather to the thought that she divined than to the words which she had not more than half heard.

While speaking, and holding herself upright before the divan on which her mistress reposed, and which was surmounted by a long mirror, Carmencita looked at herself with a sort of childlike joy, seeming to be astonished at her own costume, composed of a black dress, a white apron, and a small linen cap, whose strings thrown back showed her neck in front.

This head-dress was very becoming to her, and although she had already worn it some time she appeared to be always surprised at and enchanted with it.

"A misfortune!" repeated Dolores. "Who knows?"

"He is able to defend himself!"

"Oh! if it was only that! He has never passed the night away from home. It must be something serious —very serious—to cause it. He went out yesterday at seven o'clock?"

"Yes, madame—as usual. *He* is always going out. He ought to know Paris!" she added, with a sigh and

an envious air, which plainly said: "He is very happy! Why cannot I be so too?"

But her mistress paid no attention to this expression of restrained regret.

She threw away her cigarette.

"Ah! he shall pay for it!" replied she, "if he has not a serious reason—but there can be none——"

Her eyes flashed, her mouth became contracted, and the harsh expression on her face proved that it must be dangerous to displease or irritate her, and that she was not a woman to content herself with a vain threat.

"Hand me my fan."

Carmencita hastened to give her one of those immense fans, which the South American women hardly ever have out of their hands, and which serve at one and the same time to keep them cool and as sun-shades, the use of umbrellas being unknown to them.

"Oh! the anxiety and uncertainty!" murmured she in a rage, restrained, yet full of menace.

Carmencita regarded her without astonishment, but with a timid air, and dared not move, though not showing on her face any of those mental reservations of resolution or malevolence so common to French servants. Her look only expressed sympathy; she was respectful and resigned to anything, even to injustice and the most cruel treatment.

A half-hour thus passed by in silence.

Dolores waved her fan, closed it, re-opened it, and re-closed it, with a sudden jerk, knocking it against the palm of her left hand, her eyes fixed, absorbed in some somber and far-off pre-occupation.

Frequently her long eyelashes raised themselves, disclosing the entire eye, full of fire, as if she perceived some object visible to herself alone, and then her nostrils became distended, and her lips opened, leaving her beautiful teeth visible.

As to Carmencita; motionless, her hands crossed on her apron, she seemed frozen to her place, and her face assumed that sad expression, so remarkable among savages in repose.

All at once the door-bell sounded.

Dolores trembled and partially stood up.

"It is he!" said Carmencita. "I recognize his way of ringing."

And she ran hastily from the room.

A half minute later, she re-entered, followed by Mono.

"Here he is, madame," said she, with an uneasy and restrained sort of satisfaction.

It was, in fact, Mono himself, his pantaloons muddy, and looking fatigued.

His mistress did not say a word to him.

She looked at him, her brows contracted, pale with wrath, and all her features bearing the imprint of an anger which presaged nothing good.

Mono advanced, with lowered eyes, and knelt before her as if waiting to be interrogated.

"Where have you been?" at last said she in a hollow voice.

"Some distance, mistress."

"Why?"

"I have been working for you."

"For me?"

"Yes."

"During the whole evening, night and morning?"

"Yes, mistress."

"Then—very well. But what have you done?"

"I have found!"

She jumped to her feet, placed her white hands on the curly wool of the negro, and pushed his head back.

"Look me in the face. You have found—take care! if you lie!"

"You well know that I have never lied, mistress."

"Then what do you know?"

"Not all," said he; "oh! not all; but I have learned —certain things—refound certain persons—discovered a trail——"

"Speak, then, wretch! You see that I am on coals of fire——"

"You are not alone."

"That is true. Go away, Carmencita."

The little half-breed, who contemplated this scene without astonishment and almost without curiosity, bowed and immediately disappeared, conscientiously closing the door after her, and went to her own room, situated in the other end of the apartments.

"Now we are alone," went on Dolores, leaving the negro on his knees.

"I have discovered Coco, the 'Death's Head,'" said he, lowering his voice.

"Here at Paris?" murmured Dolores.

"Yes."

"Oh, I will see him," said she, resolutely.

"No."

"No—why?"

"He is dead!"

"Dead? How? I do not understand."

"Murdered!"

"What do you say?"

"Assassinated by Clermont, the *gaucho!*"

"Clermont? Are you sure of it?" said Dolores.

"Sure, certain, yes. I have seen him, and we will be able to find him again—whenever we wish," replied Mono.

"But then the duke——"

"Ought to be in Paris, or, if he is not, we will know where he is through the *gaucho.*"

"At last!" murmured Dolores.

"You see that I have not lost my time."

"I am content with you, Mono," said she, with a smile which had something terrible about it.

And she gave him her child-like hand.

He carried it to his lips, with a radiant air.

"Arise," continued she, briefly, "and relate to me in detail that which has passed."

CHAPTER VIII.

HUNTER AND HUNTED.

DOLORES had thrown herself on a low chair; she was not seated in it, but knelt on it, her elbows leaning on the back, her chin resting on her hands; she was silently looking Mono in the eyes, her body agitated by a slight trembling, which alone revealed the profound emotion to which she was a prey.

Mono, standing upright, directly in front of her, supported her glance like a man who understands, and who also knows that he is going to respond, at least in part, to the hopes he has excited, and to what is expected of him.

"Yesterday evening," said he, "at nightfall, I went out, as usual, saying to myself: 'I have scoured all the principal quarters of Paris for two months, and I have learned nothing, found nothing. Therefore either *he* is not in Paris, or *he* is concealed in some eccentric and miserable quarter, which has escaped my inspection:'"

"Why should he conceal himself?" interrupted Dolores; "he is not pursued; there is no complaint against him; he believes me dead."

"That is true; but, knowing himself culpable, he is afraid, and evidently takes precautions to efface his trace, since we have lost it, and for six months have sought it, at first in *Franche-Comte*, then here, where we were told he was."

"That is of no importance; continue."

"Then I went toward the Belleville quarter, which I had never yet gone through. It was well I did. It was nine o'clock, and I was following, much discouraged, but keeping a keen look-out, Trois-Couronnes street, when all at once I perceived a man's profile

which made me tremble, and whom I believed I recognized in spite of his disguise."

"His disguise?" repeated Dolores, with surprise.

"Certainly. He wore a blouse, a cap; in a word, he was dressed like the Parisian workmen. Still I could not be deceived. I had felt him, divined him. In following him I finally recognized him; besides, what subsequently occurred would have removed all doubts if I had any left."

"He saw nothing himself of you?"

"Absolutely nothing. In the first place he does not know me, neither does the duke, although I have seen him often enough to recognize him in a thousand years. When you have once said to Mono: 'Look and remember!' that is the end of it—he never forgets!"

"Where did he go?" asked Dolores, who seemed too accustomed to the negro's circumlocutions and slowness of expression to be irritated at them or to attempt to obtain a more rapid recital from him.

"Into a house on Trois-Couronnes street, which he entered resolutely, like one who knows where he is going, who has an appointment. I dared not follow him. He might have remarked me, interrogated me, and I feared awakening his suspicions or putting him on his guard. So I resolved to remain on watch before the door of the house until he should come out. If he passed the night there, then that was where he lived, and afterwards it would be easy to find out under what name he resided there, what he did, who visited him, and the rest. If he came out again in a short time I would follow him until I discovered where he *did* live."

"Did he come out again?"

"No."

"Then that is his residence?"

"Not at all. He is as unknown there as you or I. He doubtless went there for the first time, and never returned."

"Explain yourself. You see that I am dying from impatience."

"I go on, mistress. An hour passed by. It was be-

coming late, the quarter was deserted and appeared asleep. All at once, amid this silence, were heard three reports of a revolver. They came from this house, and from the top floor. I listened intently. Knowing the man, and that he was there, I thought he was there for some purpose. I did not delay in getting information. A crowd collected on the sidewalk; I discreetly mixed in it and listened. Suddenly the door opened and a man appeared, whom I afterwards learned was the janitor. He was going after the police, saying that a crime had been committed in the house. A presentiment told me that Clermont must be connected with it, and I slipped into the house behind the janitor without being perceived amid the general trouble and excitement. I mounted to the sixth floor; I silently glided among the tenants assembled on the landing, who were all speaking and gesticulating at once. Thanks to the general commotion my presence attracted no attention. They only occupied themselves with the arrival of the police. And I remained there, looking for my man."

"Well?"

"He was not there! So, as he had not come out, he must be in the closed room, where the reports of the revolver came from. 'I will go in there!' I said to myself.?'

"And did you?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"By helping the locksmith to force the door. I arranged so as to fall into the chamber, as if accidentally. Thus I was very sure, whether they left me there or not, of having enough time to see if he was there, and what had happened."

"What did you see?"

"A murdered man, hit by two bullets!"

"And that was *Coco*, the *Death's Head*?"

"Yes, mistress."

"That is singular!" said she, like one seeking to solve a problem.

"You believed him in America? I also. But he

had recently returned to France. And that proved to me that Clermont had certainly been there—that it was he who was the perpetrator of the murder!"

"They must have met?"

"Yes, and he has feared lest the other would speak?"

"That must be it, indeed!"

"I have also concluded that he was not acting for himself alone, and that a still greater danger armed his hand."

"The duke?"

"Yes, mistress. Why should the *Death's Head* disturb Clermont? Coco had no interest in denouncing him."

"Why?"

"What good would it have done him?"

"None! You are right. I see clearly; Clermont and *the other* are always together."

"That is it."

"And Clermont once again found, we will find the other!"

"Certainly!"

"But, if he is arrested, how shall we know?"

"He is not arrested."

"He has been able to escape?"

"Yes; I have saved him."

"You? And you know where he is?"

"Not just at present; for he cannot have remained there. But when one is on the track, one always arrives at the den."

"Explain yourself better."

"They at once ascertained," replied the negro, "that the assassin, whoever he was, had escaped by the roof. I offered to pursue him."

"But you might have fallen and killed yourself, or have been killed by him."

The negro raised his head with an air of artless pride.

"I am strong," said he, "and I had my *navaja!* So I hastened along the roofs, and arrived at a garret wherein he had taken refuge. I entered. I found traces of him there: in the first place, the imprints of

his feet; then, above all, *navaja* like my own. Here it is!"

Mono drew out the knife he had picked up, and offered it to his mistress.

She quickly seized it, examined it and opened it.

"Yes," she said at last. "That comes from our country. And I recognize the weapon as his, having frequently seen it in his hand. Look! see this notch on the handle. This belongs to Clermont. It is indeed his!"

Mono listened with a respectful joy, in which was visible the child-like vanity of the negro, proud of his success and of the ability he had displayed.

"Continue," she said, without letting go of the navaja, which she felt with her trembling fingers, as if asking of it remembrances, past or future promises.

"The room I entered was in great disorder. He had been surprised there by some one, and there had been a violent, but short, struggle."

Mono stopped here with a pensive and anxious air.

"What is the matter with you? Speak!" cries his uneasy mistress.

"Here I understand no more," said he. "What passed? I am ignorant. A woman stepped in—or was there——"

"What woman?"

"I do not know; but I picked up this, which belongs to her." And he tendered his mistress the cuff which had fallen in the corridor. Dolores took it and turned it over and over.

"The woman is poor," she finally said. "This piece of linen proves it, but it tells me nothing, as it bears no mark nor distinctive sign. Go on."

"From whatever cause, the struggle ceased, and, in place of delivering him up or calling for help, they concealed him."

"Oh!" said Dolores. "What does that mean?"

"I don't know, but I am certain of it," replied Mono.

"It is very strange! Some accomplice."

"Perhaps yes, perhaps no. As he was no longer

there, I followed the stairs to know what had become of him; for, as you may think, I did not wish to lose track of him. On the next floor I heard the sound of animated words. They came from people who lowered their voices so as not to attract the attention of their neighbors. I listened at the key-hole. A woman was weeping; all at once a Spanish oath reached me. *Carajo!*—He was there!"

"Who are these people?"

"You shall know. Just then the police entered the house. Knowing his retreat, I did not wish him to be taken. I returned to the room in the garret. I had everything in order there. With my shirt I effaced the foot-prints, and I regained the roof, where I concealed myself in the dark, but listened to everything. A few moments later, the police captain entered the room, followed by his men and the tenant who had given an asylum to the *gaucho*."

"Ah! and you saw him?"

"Yes."

"And you know his name?"

"Yes. He is young and handsome; he is a musician, and his name is Lapierre."

"Lapierre? Good, I shall not forget it."

"He was at first much surprised at finding his chamber put in order, as if nothing had happened there, but he said nothing, and they all soon withdrew."

"Why did you not go in again immediately?"

"I had to return to where I had come from, to show myself to the police and to say that I had been unable to discover the assassin. Without that, I should have been suspected. But they suspected, all the same, although I acted the fool, speaking like a colony negro. There was a detective there, a small man, with the look of a weasel, who questioned me in every way, about myself, about you."

"About me?"

"About my mistress."

"*Caramba!*" said Dolores, turning pale. "I would not have had this happen!"

"Rest easy. I only said what it was necessary to

say. Finally, under one pretext or another, they kept me under guard until this morning, in order to secure information, I am sure of it, and prove the correctness of my answers. At last they have released me, and I am here!"

"Thanks, Mono!" said Dolores after a short silence. "I am content with you. This is the best hour in my life of the last two years. Through this Lapierre we will find out where the duke is, and then!"

She stopped herself and smiled, showing all her white teeth, wide open; her eyes were full of fierce joy.

"And then," she repeated, "I preserve this!"

She reclosed the navaja, and pulling open her wrapper, placed it in her corset.

"I understand!" said Mono with his eyes and lips, but without uttering a word.

"Who knows, Mono? It is perhaps this weapon which has made me desperate. Eh! well, it shall also avenge me."

CHAPTER IX.

OBERKAMPF STREET.

MONO was not deceived in his conjectures. The assassin of him who was called M. Loriot had, after an arduous passage over the roofs, entered the garret in which the negro had picked up the knife and had discovered the traces of a violent struggle between two men.

The window of this garret was unfastened and only pushed to, as he had discovered by carefully feeling it over with his hands. Moreover, the room was dark and silent.

"Here is my chance!" he said to himself.

And he quickly jumped into the room.

His idea was to find the door, to open it or force it, to gain the stairs and try to get out of the house by some kind of ruse.

Knowing little of the neighborhood, he never sus-

pected that he would find himself closed in by the police, or that they had control of all the exits, or that it was impossible for him to escape.

After listening a moment he was convinced that the room was uninhabited, for he could have heard the noise, slight as it might be, of the breathing of a person asleep.

Reassured, he sought slowly the door and reached it. It was directly opposite the window.

He tried to open it, when he heard a quick step on the outside, coming toward him, and almost immediately a key was introduced into the lock.

He quickly threw himself to one side.

His resolution was taken.

To fly again, he neither wished to attempt it nor could he.

It was a miracle that he had not already killed himself during his aerial passage over the roofs rendered slippery by the rain.

Besides, where would they lead him? to another garret, perhaps, which might be occupied by some one with whom he would have to fight for his liberty.

Therefore it was better to remain where he was and at once accept the struggle which presented itself.

He would, at least, be saved or lost immediately.

He therefore pressed close to the wall, near the door, saying to himself that he thus possessed certain advantages, and that by precipitating himself from behind, upon the person who was about to enter, it was possible to knock him down before he could utter a cry.

So he left his open knife in his pocket, reserving it for use later on.

His plan, conceived with the intuitive rapidity usual to these desperate situations, consisted, in fact, in at once seizing his victim by the throat, to stop his voice, to overthrow him, then to finish him with a thrust from the navaja, if there was any need of it.

Scarcely had he terminated this scene in his mind than the door opened and a young man entered, holding in his hand a lighted candle.

The door opened inwardly, and it chanced that the murderer was just behind it when open, and was perfectly concealed by it.

The young man, without disturbing himself to close the door behind him, advanced toward the table to place his candle on it.

At the same time his back was turned toward the one who was watching him, but who could not see his features.

But even before he had been able to put down the light he carried in his right hand, he whom Mono called Clermont, the *Gaucho*, had reclosed the door and fallen upon the new-comer, whom he seized by the neck with both his hands, terrible and strong as iron pincers.

He who was attacked thus had not time to utter a cry.

The candle escaped from him and went rolling to some distance. He made a sudden movement to free himself; but, half suffocated, he fell, drawing with him the table full of papers and the man who was trying to strangle him.

There then took place a terrible, but silent, struggle.

The young man was endowed with uncommon vigor, and though taken at a disadvantage, and though his breath failed him, he made prodigious efforts and struggled fiercely.

The assassin, fearing that the noise of the shock and the sound of their feet could not help attracting attention, passed his legs under those of his victim, and by lying heavily on his back ceased for a moment the pressure of his hands.

He even entirely withdrew one in order to feel in his pocket, seize his knife and put a sudden end to the situation.

This movement was unsuccessful, and put a change on the whole struggle.

We have said that the young man was uncommonly strong.

As soon as he felt a cessation of the restraint which suffocated him he made a tremendous effort, seized

the hand which still held his neck and succeeded in disengaging it.

Then, putting his arms behind him, he clasped his adversary's body as in a vise and endeavored, in his turn, to get the other underneath.

Meanwhile he uttered no cry, either because he had not sufficiently recovered his breath to call for help or he had lost his head, and his fury left him with only the instinctive idea of defense and vengeance.

Probably both causes acted simultaneously to prolong his silence.

The assassin soon felt that the affair was very serious, and that the using of his knife became more and more necessary if he did not wish to succumb in this struggle of man to man.

Although continuing to defend himself sufficiently from his adversary he nevertheless diminished his resistance and entirely ceased acting on the offensive, only seeking to get hold of the navaja in his pantaloons pocket, always open and ready for use.

The younger man quickly profited by the superiority which this left him to throw his enemy under him and keep him there motionless and inoffensive; but Clermont finally got hold of his knife and slyly thrust it toward the bosom of the man he wished to kill.

The weapon touched the body, cut through the clothes and pricked the flesh.

It would have been all over if he whom he threatened had not, under the influence of pain, violently thrown himself aside and seized the handle of the weapon.

The combat assumed a new aspect.

Neither of them directly attacked the other. The only struggle now was for the possession of the knife.

It was a rapid one; but the assassin, comprehending that the chances were against him, raised himself by a supreme effort, recovered his advantage, closely clasped his adversary, and succeeded, for the second time, in getting him underneath.

He would have probably triumphed or the young man would have at last called for help, finding him-

self succumbing in this savage duel, when the door suddenly opened.

The murderer, on hearing the noise of the hinges, and on seeing a new person enter, uttered a low exclamation of fury and despair, and, holding up his head, looked backward in such a way that he faced the person who had just entered; and, moreover, his face was lighted up by the candle she carried in her hand, which also shone upon her own.

She was a woman of fifty years of age, with a thin, pale, sad and distinguished face.

The sight of her appeared to produce an extraordinary emotion on the part of the bandit, for his hands opened, and he suddenly arose and recoiled to the other side of the room. In doing so he dropped his knife.

The young man immediately seized it, and, arising, was about to throw himself on his opponent, when the woman caught his arm.

Since her arrival she had remained near the door, as if thunderstruck, regarding the assassin with eyes in which one read the greatest despair and horror.

Her mouth, which had opened to call for help on seeing her son's danger, had not reclosed, and the words, frozen on her rigid lips, had not escaped her.

Held back by his mother's hand, the young man had had time to look at the man who had tried first to strangle and then to stab him.

"Ah, my God!" he finally murmured, in a stifled voice; "it is Bernard, the duke's steward! Ah, wretch!"

And he made a forward movement, brandishing the knife.

But his mother still retained her hold on him; and, as if a greater terror returned the voice which another terror had deprived her of, she said, in a low and quick tone, which was hard to hear, and which revealed her inward anguish:

"Stop, Gaston! That man is your father—my husband! It is Louis Clermont!"

Gaston let fall the knife, and regarded his mother with a half-crazed expression on his countenance.

CHAPTER X.

A FAMILY SCENE.

"EH? Well, what of it? Yes, it is I!" murmured the wretch, with an indescribable accent of embarrassment, surprise and bravado. "It appears that we are a family party! The devil take me if I expected it! You are not going to give me up? You have arrived in time, Ernestine, to avert a great misfortune!"

He glanced at his son, for whom he felt a sort of brutal admiration, with a confused air.

"He is a rough fellow!" added he, between his teeth. "*Carajo!* what a wrist!"

"My father? Ah, *that* is my father!" finally said the young man, without withdrawing his eyes from his mother, as if he had a horror or terror of looking at him who bore that title.

"Eh? Yes, once more!" replied the bandit. "We meet again under the worst conditions; but, in short, we are met, and my good star has led me here. You will conceal me, I think? I am pursued—they may discover my tracks on the roof! Perhaps before five minutes the police will be here; and then, good-evening to the present company! I shall be on my way to Roquette—to the place of execution!"

The man who spoke thus, and whom we have not yet seen, for we have reported his actions before knowing who he was, and without having any possibility of considering and of studying him, evidently affected a tone of cynicism and a vulgarity of expressions little in conformity with his origin and education.

Indeed, despite his blouse, at present in tatters, his soiled shirt, and the coarse clothes he wore; despite

the rough and grisly beard which concealed part of his face, there was something about him which denoted a man of the better and educated class.

He was large, thin and vigorous-looking, but his features had a certain kind of delicacy, and his bearing, even at this moment, revealed habits very different from those of the wretches whom deep misery and abject ignorance have, as if by fate, thrown into crime, —that inferior and desperate method of social protest against inequality.

His hard features, strongly marked, did not lack traces of former beauty.

Now withered, altered by the lines of every wicked passion, with a brown skin, which announced a long residence under the ardent sun of a hot climate, wrinkled, and as if furrowed a second time under the successive action of long privations and unrestrained excesses, that related the sad history of one of those failures in life which are all the more terrible when the victim has fallen from the highest class.

He had light grey eyes, bordering on blue; thin lips, a prominent nose, tapering toward the end; a largely-developed lower jaw, which indicates guile; an indented and prominent forehead, indicating violence and obstinacy; bushy hair, with numerous curly, white streaks, cut short like a brush; he was from fifty-five to sixty years of age, at most, and appeared, nevertheless, to brave society, as he had braved his wife and son, who were overwhelmed by his presence.

His hands, which had clasped the young man's neck like iron pincers, were long and hairy, but elegantly-shaped, as were his feet, in the frightful shoes that hid them.

His two auditors heard him with a sort of fright, which, in the son, was mingled with despair; and in the wife, with indignation.

"Well," went on Louis Clermont, which was his true name, "haven't you understood me? I tell you that I am pursued—that I must be concealed, saved, and quickly, unless you wish to send me to the guillotine. That is plain, isn't it?"

Gaston shuddered at the word guillotine, and threw on his mother one of those eloquent looks which speak, more strongly than any words, a thought too rapid for expression in language.

This look contained, beside a desperate appeal, a sort of vague and earnest prayer.

Madame Lapierre—or rather Madame Clermont, for Lapierre was only her maiden name, which she had reassumed, and under which she concealed the shame of her husband—trembled at this glance, whose eloquence and supplication she understood at once.

"Come, then, sir," said she, bruskly, addressing her husband, and left the room, showing him the way.

He hastened after her, followed by his son; and all three, without troubling themselves concerning the condition in which they left the chamber in which had occurred this new scene in the family drama. The son even forgot to pick up the fallen candle, and to withdraw the key from the door. In his fright and trouble he silently descended the stairs, and entered an apartment on the fifth floor, where Madame Lapierre had established a small dressmaking shop, in order to keep herself, and help her child to an honorable future.

The apartment, a small one, comprised three rooms, and a kitchen to the right of the entrance.

Opposite the door, from which it was separated by a narrow passage, was another opening into a large room, which served as the shop; then came two other rooms on each side—Gaston's bed-chamber and his mother's.

The young man had also, as we have seen, at his disposal a garret room on the sixth floor, in which he worked.

The father took in the different positions of the rooms with wonderful rapidity, while they were traversing the corridor and shop in order to gain Madame Lapierre's bed-chamber, where they shut themselves in, as it was the most retired room of the apartment.

Louis Clermont took an inventory of the chamber in a single glance, and made a sorry face, which seemed to say:

"Decidedly they are not rich here, and have not made a fortune during my absence."

The room, indeed, although fastidiously clean, was furnished with a simplicity which revealed the modest resources of mother and son.

A walnut bedstead, with its white coverlet; a chest of drawers and a wardrobe, of walnut; some chairs, covered with dark-green rep, also one of those divans without a back, which, at need, can serve as a couch. This was all of the furniture of Madame Lapierre's bed-chamber, for we shall continue to give her the name of her choice, adopted by both herself and son.

She deposited the candle on the mantel, which was opposite the bed, and turning bruskly and abruptly toward her husband, said to him, with a latent resolution which seemed the stifled echo of every grief and anguish:

"Sir, it is on my son's account that I save you, that I bring you here, where you should never have put your feet. He is an honest man. And I wish honor and consideration for him, and as much happiness as possible, having such a father as you! There is enough shame on his name; but this shame is partly forgotten; it is entirely unknown by those who surround us and help us to live. Your arrest would renew it all. I believed you dead ever since you escaped from prison four years ago, and as I had never since heard you spoken of. As you are alive, I will not send you to the scaffold. What must be done in order that you may escape without risk? for you never shall re-enter the threshold of that door, and you must depart immediately."

Hardly yet reassured in regard to his fate, and comprehending, even from his wife's speech, the advantages of his position, Louis Clermont heard her with a half-smile of irony and bravado, evidently forced, thanks to which he struggled against the humiliation of being thus treated (at his own home after all) before this grand young man, his son.

As low as one may have fallen, there always remains a little vanity, above all in a man who has known the

value of certain sentiments and of certain ties, although he has stamped the one under foot and broken with the other.

"Depart!" replied he, in a slow and railing tone. "How can I? Not all at once, in any case. I have already told you I was pursued."

"They will not come here to seek for you. I will open the janitor's door, and you can pass out without being seen."

"Ta! ta! ta! Not in this costume, in the first place. I need another—more becoming. This is a disguise. I have not become a street blackguard, I pray you believe, Ernestine. Besides, the whole neighborhood is astir, and I would risk being *nipped* in going out thus. I heard plain enough the shouts which came up to me during my aerial flight!"

"What shouts? Where have you come from? What have you done?"

Clermont assumed an expression of infernal triumph, happy at showing his great atrocity, happy at plunging still farther into despair those who despised him and on whom he depended; for the silence of his son, standing motionless, a little behind him, and whose looks he felt were fastened upon him, bore hard upon him and perhaps irritated him more than his wife's words.

"What have I done? Then you did not hear the reports of a revolver, a short while ago?"

"Yes, I vaguely heard one or two dull sounds; but I did not know what it was."

"Where the devil are we, here?"

"In Oberkampf street."

"The distance explains your calmness. Well, those shots came from my revolver. I have killed a man yonder, in Trois-Couronnes street."

Madame Lapierre recoiled in fright, whilst Gaston uttered a low exclamation and advanced toward him, his face livid and his eyes menacing and terrible.

"This is fine!" said the wretch, recoiling. "No airs! You know well enough what I am, both of you, for my——"

He was about to say "my son," but he did not dare to, before Gaston's look.

"For this young man, who has not seen me in twenty years, evidently knows my whole history from you, madame!

"I am not here to listen to moralizing or to learn what you think of me. I come from killing a man, it is true——but he threatened me, and I did it in self-defense. Only, no one would believe me! You have my name. Do you wish to send me to the scaffold? No. For your own sakes, not for mine. *Carajo!*—— it is all the same to me. So do what is necessary!"

Madame Lapierre had fallen on a chair, with her head concealed in her hands. Her fictitious energy had abandoned her. She burst into tears.

Seeing his mother's condition, the son appeared to recover his composure.

"Sir," said he, in a low voice, "let me finish this. It will kill my mother——whom you very nearly killed, formerly. I remember it all, though I was then only five years old. You need clothes."

"Yes."

"Perhaps mine will fit you."

The mother roused herself.

"Yours, no! no! I will not have it!" said she, with a horrified gesture.

"Yes, if they pinch me, that might compromise him!" sneered Louis Clermont.

"We will buy some, to-morrow, at dawn. You can remain here to-night."

"I prefer that!" replied the escaped convict.

And he fell upon the divan like a man overcome with fatigue.

There was a moment's silence.

All at once Gaston raised his head like a man who was unable any longer to resist expressing an idea which for some time had pursued and mastered him, and, turning to his mother, he said, with a heart-rending accent:

"Mother, under the name of Bernard, he is the Duke de Kandos' steward."

Madame Lapierre held up her head in astonishment.

"Yes," went on her son, "I have seen him there every day for several months. He is in the duke's confidence. Oh, this is frightful!"

"Well, yes, we knew each other without knowing the ties that united us," replied Louis Clermont, looking his son over from head to foot.

"You shall not return there!" said the son, violently.

"You deceive yourself. The duke likes and esteems me, as I like him and esteem him. Two fingers of the same hand are not more in accord."

"You shall not return there, I tell you. I forbid it! Do you hear me?"

"Take care!" cried the bandit, arising; "take care! Do not interfere in that; do not occupy yourself about it, or, as true as my name is Louis Clermont, and I am capable of anything, *carajo!* you shall repent it!"

His face had assumed an angry and threatening expression. His eyes became bloodshot, his lips trembled, and his hand seemed mechanically to seek a weapon at his waist, under his torn and dirty blouse.

Madame Lapierre, much alarmed, threw herself between the two men. But at that moment they heard a knocking. It was the police captain, searching the house.

CHAPTER XI.

AT THE DUKE'S.

AVENUE Neuilly, an eccentric continuation of Champs-Elysees and Grande-Armee avenues, extends to the Seine.

Almost at its extremity, on the left, back from the street and near the river, there was, at that time, a rather large house, in the middle of a garden which was a marvel of freshness and verdure.

The house, situated in the center of the grounds, and surrounded by walls whose hight prevented outsiders from seeing within, and which only left visible the topmost branches of the highest trees, was large and slightly severe-looking, like most buildings which Time has covered with his solemn colors.

It had but two stories above the ground floor, which was reached by a flight of a dozen steps, protected from the violence of the weather by a covering of glass.

From without one could only perceive the pointed roof, and, through the iron entrance-gate, the front windows of the upper stories, all beneath disappearing behind the thick verdure and lilac bushes. Besides, in winter, when the trees let fall the protecting veil of their green leaves, shutters, which could be raised or lowered at will, still more completely cut off the glances of the curious.

Here, for some months, had lived the Duke of Kandos and his family.

Although he bore the name of one of the most illustrious families of Franche-Comte, which was also counted one of the richest, the duke was seldom spoken of, nor was he often seen; he appeared to have

no connection with Parisian society; he never received, nor gave any *fetes*, and never went out into the world.

As he had now been installed in this residence for some time; as he had come in the summer, and as the neighborhood was sufficiently isolated, and inhabited by people in no wise belonging to the same class of society, and with whom he was not obliged to enter into any relations, the neighbors never troubled themselves about the duke, and he lived there almost ignored:—lost in that general indifference which surrounds every stranger in Paris, and which envelops him as if in a shroud.

The only thing of which they sometimes spoke was the attractive beauty of his wife, much younger than himself, and the original and striking beauty of his daughter by his first wife, now eighteen years old.

The house had been so arranged that the reception and drawing-rooms were on the ground floor, and the duke had made no change in the original plan.

The first floor contained his own particular apartment, and that of the duchess.

The second floor had been reserved for his daughter, who, with her governess, occupied but a small portion of it.

The rest was empty, or, rather, uninhabited for the present.

Bernard, the steward, occupied a small pavilion separated from the main building, in which he had nothing but his office.

The sufficiently numerous domestics were lodged either in the basement or in the story under the roof, which contained, independently of garrets, a number of rooms, very comfortable and agreeable, owing to the view obtained, which was rather extensive, including portions of the banks of the Seine and Courbevoie rivers.

At the moment we enter the duke's residence an entire day had elapsed since the commission of the crime we have related at the beginning of this

authentic recital, and the morning of the second day was already somewhat advanced as eleven o'clock had just sounded.

The Duke of Kandos was alone in his study, which was magnificently furnished in ebony—a serious and even severe-looking study. He was slowly walking back and forth, his hands clasped behind his back, his face thoughtful and anxious; it was more than anxious, it was profoundly sad and uneasy.

He was a man of forty-five, above the ordinary size, not thin, but spare and muscular; one of those temperaments hardened for, and by constant struggle. One in which nature has left no quality untried.

His figure, supple and well preserved, was still that of a young man, as was also his carriage.

Although advanced to middle age, one could see that he had been a very handsome man, and, in fact, was so still.

Thick chestnut hair, in which were a few silver threads, framed his intelligent forehead, under which shone the light of clear blue eyes.

His features, although worn and bronzed, were neither lacking in grace nor distinction; at least what could be seen of them, for he wore a full beard, lighter than his hair, and bordering on blonde.

The mouth was slightly sensual; the nose was straight.

Altogether, his appearance was attractive, despite the threatening brilliancy of his glance, and the deep wrinkle between his eye-brows, which seemed to reveal persistent and painful preoccupation.

Amid the luxury which surrounded him he was dressed with great simplicity. His clothing was well made but unpretentious, and showed off his aristocratic figure to the greatest advantage.

After taking a few turns he threw himself, with an air of lassitude, abandon, and discouragement, upon a sofa, before a table full of journals and papers, leaned his elbows on the table, and concealed his face in his hands.

All at once he trembled.

A young woman entered, almost noiselessly, through a door concealed under thick tapestry.

She was in a fresh morning dress.

She was a charming creature, as delicate, gracious, fragile, and tender as one just emerging from youth, with the added charm of a mature woman, which she was.

Indeed, according to her birth certificate, she was twenty-eight years old.

Her curly light hair, her small hands and feet, her fresh lips, the softness of her white, velvety skin, colored from time to time with a quick bright color, and her large dark blue eyes, framed and shaded by her brown curved eyelashes, made her, at the first glance, look only fifteen or sixteen years old.

The expression of her face was sweet and passionate, tender and ardent at one and the same time, and it is easily understood that one could not see her without admiring her, could not admire without loving her.

She wore a dress which set off the grace of her supple figure and magnificent bust, and which also displayed her white neck and arms. Her fine and delicately rounded wrists were covered with red velvet bands, a knot of the same throwing its brilliant flame through her golden hair.

She advanced toward the duke, whose back was to her, threw her arms, whose balmy freshness caressed his cheeks, around his neck, seized his hands with one of hers, and put the white fingers of the other over his eyes, saying in a low, musical voice:

"Guess who it is?—Is it *Jeanne*, *Jeannette*, or *Jeanneton?*"

"It is my beloved Jeanne!" murmured the duke, drawing the fingers from his eyes to his lips.

"Which means that my Paul is sad!" replied the young wife, with an accent of affected chiding and in an almost maternal tone, which made one smile, coming as it did from this fresh young mouth, and addressed to one so greatly her senior. "Oh! You

bad boy!" added she, turning his face toward hers. "One might think that you had been weeping!"

In fact, the duke's eyelids were red, and a tear, not yet dried, shone in the corner of his eye-lash.

"Pardon me, Jeanne," he said, with an outburst of restrained passion, and drawing toward him the young woman, who suddenly found herself seated on his knees. "Pardon me—I am not always able, as you know, to govern this melancholy, which masters me, when I ask myself if I merit the happiness which surrounds me, and of which you are the adorable personification."

"If you merit it, Paul!" cried Jeanne. "But did you not suffer enough formerly?—And has not your little Jeanne, as you call me when you are very much in love with me, been able to cast a ray of sunlight into all this great melancholy, of which I know nothing?"

"Yes, my beloved—oh! yes, you are right, and, when you are with me—I forget all!" said he, with an imperceptible shudder.

"Ah! how I wish to see you as happy as I am!" she replied.

"True, you are happy, are you not?" added he, devouring her with ardent, clear eyes, whose glance had a burning and singular look.

"Am I happy?—What a question!—I owe you everything!—A family: for I was an orphan. A fortune, for I was poor. You have made me a duchess.—Great heavens! I am the little Duchess Jeanne," said she, trying to laugh so as to bring a smile to her husband's lips.

"A sad duchess, who does not go into the world, and who conceals her youth and beauty for my sake."

"*For you*, certainly! What do I owe others? You do not love the world, and I love only you.—So we are both content. Ah! yes, I was forgetting—I do very much love my dear Annette; my step-daughter, as they stupidly call her, when she is my sister, my daughter, my friend, anything you may wish except my step-daughter—for then I should be her step-moth-

er—and that is a detestable name, which awakens detestable ideas—"

All the time she was speaking, in this childish manner which delighted him, her glance never quit her husband's face;—a glance full of uneasy tenderness, in which was reflected a mind much more serious and energetic than her language would have given one reason to suspect,—a language which she only used in order to chase away the duke's sadness.

In such moments she called herself *Jeannette*; when she laughed, as she did when her husband was happy, *Jeanneton*; but when she caressed, or reasoned with him, *Jeanne*.

"Yes, *you* love me," said the duke, embracing her with a sort of transport.

"You said that with reference to Annette?"

"No."

"Yes, you did. You believe that your daughter does not love you."

"Annette is cold towards me, not at all expansive—but she loves you—and that is important," responded the duke with an effort.

"Listen, Paul," interrupted Jeanne, in a more serious tone, "Annette's is a singular nature, owing, doubtless, to the mixed blood in her veins. She is romantic and extraordinarily passionate, rushing with violence into the small number of ideas which pre-occupy and absorb her. She adores the memory of her mother, whom, nevertheless, she has never known, and whose tragic death, two years since, shortly before your return from America, made an ineffaceable impresision upon her. She knows, through her grandfather and from the neighborhood gossip, when she was in Franche-Comte, that you lived on bad terms with each other, that you were separated, were reunited, and that there were quarrels between you two—and, as no one has ever dared to tell her the truth in regard to the character of your first wife, Mariquita, she has imagined a mother for herself, and has surrounded her with a glorified halo."

"And it is I whom she accuses!" said the duke, with

more of uneasiness than sorrow. "Are you sure that she has nothing else against me?"

"What could she have against you?"

"I do not know—For the moment, I feared—"

"What?"

"Nothing. You are right—but it is painful."

"It will pass away—I have done all I could to accomplish it during the year that I have been your wife."

"And yet she loves you, you who have replaced her mother—and whom she ought to detest—having the feelings you describe. It is strange—illogical."

"I don't say no—but women, young girls above all, are thus constituted. We were friends, she and I, before I knew you, as much so as the differences in our ages would permit; for I am ten years older than she. She knows that I have never seen nor met the first duchess—who was dead when you returned, and I loved you—or you loved me—whichever you please. I don't know who was the first to commence."

"Both of us."

"So she cannot blame me for the past. I am very good to give you all these explanations!—for the heart rarely reasons. It feels, it loves, it is indifferent, it detests—it is absurd—But, when it is your Jeanne's heart, it is steadfast where it attaches itself and tells itself every day: "What good fortune! I have fallen upon my feet; and is it not right?"

The duke seized his wife in his arms; their lips met; and for an instant all clouds disappeared from his forehead, and his shining eyes reflected nothing but deep joy and unspeakable happiness.

"And then," continued Jeanne, disengaging herself, trembling and blushing, "Annette is at the age when one neither knows what one wishes nor what one feels —she is eighteen—so was I; she is a young girl—I was too. One does not analyze what passes in the confusion of the transition from obscure childhood to real life. Moreover, she is in love—you can understand what chaos that makes in her poor little heart."

"I know it, and I am not opposed to her love. When

he asks for her hand, I will willingly grant it to him."

"You are so good. And then you are rich enough for that, aren't you? But I know that that is not always a reason—on the contrary!"

The duke had trembled at these words from his wife making allusion to their wealth, and his face once more became somber.

"Only," continued the duchess, "she may doubt the earnestness of his intentions."

"Why doesn't he speak of it to me?"

"I know nothing about it. It is their own secret. Timidity, pride, and a romantic spirit which seeks to create difficulties for itself—perhaps——"

She stopped herself, and looked at him.

"If you made the first step?"

"I?"

"Yes, you. It is not exactly according to custom. But what difference does that make, if it is done in a spirit of kindness?"

"You are an angel!" murmured the duke.

"That is understood!"

"Do you wish it?"

"Yes! but it is unnecessary to speak of it to Annette. Let her have the surprise of receiving her husband, him whom she loves—from the hand of her father."

"Whom she does not love."

"Yes, she does! She loves you, and she will love you still more, later on. Besides, it is much less serious than if you did not love her. She would be defenceless and without comfort before your antipathy, indifference or hardheartedness. Children are only happy when they are made so."

"And their seniors, also, Jeanne. But this young man has not made his appearance for two days," added the duke, preoccupied.

"Neither has your steward, a vile man whom I do not like, and who is on one of his habitual sprees. Ah! if only he should never return!"

At these words the duke became very pale, and he

turned away from Jeanne's eyes, while a marked shudder shook his whole body.

CHAPTER XII.

THE STORY AS TOLD BY THE NEWSPAPERS.

"WHAT is it, Paul?" quickly asked the young wife. "Have I given you pain?"

"No, no, I assure you," murmured the duke, trying to steady his voice, which was much altered by some deep internal emotion.

"Yes, yes, I see it plainly! I am a fool. You have a great affection for Bernard. He has been a part of your life. Don't pay any attention to the silly things I frequently say. He is not attractive to me. What does that prove? You know him much better than I; if he pleases you he ought to please me. Besides, you know that I have never treated him ill, and that he cannot complain of me."

"Oh! no. You are good to him, as you are to everybody—even too much so, at times. Don't bother yourself about him. Just leave him alone—I ask nothing more. But I cannot send him away—I ought not to. He is devoted to me, useful—necessary—indispensable."

"Make no excuses, and let us speak of something else," said she, quickly, with visible regret at having raised an inopportune and awkward question; and at having, even for a moment, pained her husband.

"See!" she went on, in order to change the subject, "you have not even opened your newspapers this morning."

"They had just arrived, and I was about to read them when you entered."

While he was speaking Jeanne had seized the topmost paper, opened it, and run her eyes over it seeking news which might interest and distract her husband's mind from the painful thoughts which still

occupied it, and whose traces were visible in his looks.

"Ah! ah!" cried she, "another crime—always crimes! Crime is something I have never been able to comprehend. It seems to me that I am so incapable of committing one, and that it would be so abominable, that those who do commit them are not the children of our Father."

"Crime!" repeated the duke, gloomily. "Do not be too severe, Jeanne. Its true name—is sometimes misfortune, fatality. But of what particular crime are you now speaking?" quickly added the duke, without giving his wife time to answer, and trying to look over her shoulder in order to read the paper she held in her hand.

But Jeanne arose from her husband's knees and seated herself in a low chair opposite to him.

"No, no!" she cried, "you shall not read it—I am going to read it aloud."

"Very well; I am listening."

Jeanne commenced in a clear and distinct voice:

"'A new crime, surrounded by mysterious circumstances, has thrown a whole neighborhood into consternation.

"'It occurred night before last at such a late hour that we were only able to make a slight allusion to it in our issue of yesterday.

"'The following are the details, as far as we have been able to gather them up to the present, and of which we guarantee the perfect correctness:

"'Night before last, towards ten o'clock, several pistol-shots greatly disturbed the inmates of a tenement house in Trois-Couronnes street.'"

"Trois-Couronnes street!" interrupted the duke, with a sudden start.

"Yes; do you know it?"

"I, no—that is to say—yes—I have passed by there—perhaps, once——"

And, as his wife regarded him, surprised at his emotion over the name of a street she had never before heard of, for she only knew that portion of Paris

which all strangers become acquainted with after a few months, he tried to recover himself, adding in an agitated voice :

"Go on, Jeanne ; continue."

"'The shots proceeded from a room on the sixth story, directly under the roof,'" read Jeanne, "'whose door was fastened on the inside. The janitor hastened to call the police, and soon a captain, accompanied by a locksmith, entered the room where they supposed (alas! with reason) that a bloody drama, assassination, or suicide, had been enacted.

"'Their first supposition was the true one!

"'They found there a man who had been hit by two bullets ; one had pierced his heart, the other had entered his skull.

"'As to the assassin, he must have escaped by the roof, for he had disappeared without leaving any trace, and, the door being locked on the inside, he could not have escaped in any other way.

"'The most curious thing about the whole matter is that robbery was not the motive of this cowardly crime.

"'In fact, the victim is a man at least sixty years old, apparently belonging to the lower classes of society, although he lived, without performing any labor, on unknown resources.

"'In the house they called him M. Lariot. He had only lived there for a few weeks.

"'They found no papers about him which could serve to establish his identity, tell whence he came, or what had been his past life.

"'He had evidently tried to defend himself against the incomprehensible aggression to which he had finally succumbed, for there was found near him a revolver, one of whose chambers had been discharged.

"'From an inspection of the body, death must have been instantaneous.

"'There is great excitement in the neighborhood where the crime was committed.

"'One is lost in conjectures as to the causes of this abominable crime.'" * * * * * *

Jeanne stopped.

"And that is all?" asked the duke, in a hollow voice.

"Yes. Ah! I was mistaken—here are some more details, a little lower down."

"What are they?"

Jeanne resumed her reading: * * * * * *

"'The authorities believe themselves to be on the track of the murderer. They have surrounded that quarter of the city, have subjected it to a minute *surveillance*, and searches have been ordered in all the houses of the entire block, of which Trois-Couronnes street forms one of the sides.

"'In case the assassin, after having gained the roof, took refuge in one of these houses, he cannot escape the active researches of which he is the object.'" * *

The duke remained silent, his forehead wrinkled, and his lips contracted, but appearing to take the greatest interest in this affair, which nevertheless very much resembled affairs of the same nature, with which the newspapers are constantly crammed.

Jeanne, without looking at her husband, continued glancing over the paper, in order to see if there was any other news that was interesting or dramatic, when she suddenly exclaimed:

"Ah—ah! Here are later and more complete details!"

The duke raised his head.

"'The last edition,'" read the young wife. * * *

"At the moment of going to press, we have just received information of great importance, which gives an entirely new character to the crime which is just now exciting our inhabitants.

"'At last the identity of the victim, who called himself M. Loriot, has been established beyond a doubt. That was a false name. The man's body had on the right fore-arm divers tattooings, remarkable among which were *a death's head* above *a heart pierced by a knife.* These excited the attention and suspicions of one of the most intelligent detectives of the department, who accompanied the police captain of the district in his preliminary investigations. The body was taken to

the morgue for the autopsy, and was visited by all the detectives of the police department, as well as by a certain number of ex-convicts, who are now in the jail.

"'This step was crowned with complete success.

"'"That is Coco, called the *Death's-Head*," cried an escaped convict, at sight of the corpse.

"'The real name of the pretended Loriot was Vigot. He was a convict who had escaped from Cayenne some years since. His tattooings had earned him the above surname.

"'Therefore the crime of which he was the victim must, according to all probability, have been the result of some vengeance on the part of one of his former fellow-prisoners.

"'It is in this direction that the authorities are pushing their investigations, and they all profess to believe, now that they are on the right track, that they will not be long in finding the assassin, who must himself be an ex-convict, or an escaped one, concealed in Paris, who came expressly to accomplish an old vendetta.'"

* * * * * * Jeanne, on finishing this recital, raised her eyes to her husband's, and uttered a cry.

The duke was livid. He was standing up, leaning on the table, his eyes fixed and his lips trembling.

"Oh! Heavens! You are sick, Paul? You scare me!" And she hastened toward him.

At the sound of her voice, and at her touch, the duke appeared to recover himself.

"It is nothing," he murmured. "A mere giddiness. It's passing off."

"Sit down, then. You are trembling all over."

"I am subject to these attacks—since I lived in America," replied the duke, yielding to his wife's pressure, and letting himself fall once more into his chair. "Don't disturb yourself. A glass of water—that is all I need. Above all, call no one—say nothing to anyone."

"I will run and get it myself," cried Jeanne, half distracted, and she hastened out of the room.

"Oh!" murmured the duke, when alone, pressing his forehead in despair. "It is really he—I was afraid

of it—blood again—Will this never finish?" And a sob, of rage and terror, mounted to his throat, putting an end to his words.

CHAPTER XIII.

ANNETTE.

ABOUT eight days after the scene we have just described, one Sunday evening, at nightfall, a ring was heard at the door leading to the apartments occupied by Madame Lapierre and her son. They had no servant, except an old woman who came every morning to clean the rooms and do the roughest of the work. In all evils there is some good, especially in poverty, for the presence of a servant would doubtless have prevented their being able to conceal Louis Clermont; and the horrible truth, which the mother and son wished to keep from the world, would have been found out, by making known the husband and father whom they had believed dead or forever lost.

Therefore it was always Madame Lapierre or Gaston who opened the door for visitors.

This time it was Gaston.

He found himself face to face with a veiled woman, but not so completely hidden that he could not recognize her, for he recoiled two or three steps, crying out in a voice overcome with emotion:

"Annette!—you here?"

"Yes! As you did not come, I had to."

And as the young man remained where he was, stupefied, and almost beside himself, the young girl added:

"Do you refuse even to receive me?"

"Oh!" cried Gaston, with an accent which contained over a thousand different feelings, the most prominent among which were passion and grief. And, quickly seizing her by the hand, he drew her into the apartment, after having precipitately closed the door behind them.

Without exchanging a word, but still holding her hand, they both entered the large central room, that which served as the shop.

At the moment it was empty, the three or four work-women whom Madame Lapierre employed having doubtless finished their day's labor.

A small lamp, covered with a shade, stood on a table, and threw forth a soft light.

Arrived at the center of the room, the young girl disengaged her hand, raised her veil, and remained standing in front of Gaston, who regarded her with a mixture of ardent admiration and deep grief.

This young girl, endowed with great beauty, was of a strange type, which struck the beholder, even before one knew whether she was more beautiful than original, or dreamed of asking one's self that question.

At first one only saw her eyes, which were large, widely opened and of great brilliancy. Their color was undefinable, being of that grey, blue and sea-green color which the Greeks attributed to Juno's eyes. They had those changeable reflections and luminous sparks which make one think of twin stars, or of diamonds which have received life and expression in addition to their brilliant light.

The young girl's pale complexion, delicate features, red lips, eyebrows and eyelashes black like her hair, which was extraordinarily abundant and came low down on her forehead, where intelligence and will shone forth, all composed a whole whose effect was irresistible.

She captured and compelled admiration before one knew he was charmed, and, when one did perceive it, the charm was already so powerful that it was too late to try and escape or even seek to resist it.

This particular evening, when she had raised her veil, and her eyes appeared like stars that had come from under a cloud which had concealed them, she was paler than usual, and her glance, still moist from scarcely dried tears, assumed a most extraordinary scintillation.

"Yes, I repeat," she said, in an agitated voice, "I

came, because you did not come. What has happened? What does this absence, this abandonment, mean?"

"Oh! do not speak of abandonment, Annette!" cried the young man, with an accent of grief and despair. "I am yours, as you well know, since the first day I ever saw you."

He suddenly stopped, gazed at her for a second, and made a violent effort to subdue his emotions; becoming once more master of himself, he said, in a calmer tone:

"My mother has been suffering all this week. I have remained with her——"

"She is not suffering so much that she cannot go out," interrupted the young girl. "I assured myself of that before coming up. I wished to see you alone, Gaston; this state of affairs cannot last. We must have an explanation—I cannot live thus."

She threw herself into a chair, like a woman resolved not to go away without having received a clear and categorical answer.

Gaston stood before her, agitated, troubled, evidently drawn in contrary directions by his feelings, the violence of which could be easily read on his disturbed countenance, on which appeared above all an expression of deep grief.

"Listen," continued Annette, in a low voice, "we have loved each other for a long time; or, at least, loving you, I believed myself loved in return by you."

"Oh! Annette, can you doubt it?"

"Yes, I can; I can doubt you, while I cannot doubt myself! The proof of it is that I am here this evening contrary to all proprieties, and that you no longer come to us."

The young man made a gesture of protest.

"Your mother's illness," pursued she, "is only a pretext——"

"I swear to you——"

"Don't swear, that is useless; I would not believe you!"

Gaston clasped his hands with such an eloquent

expression of grief that the duke's daughter was touched.

"Let us see," said she, in a kindlier tone, "answer me frankly, sincerely. The duke has written to you, I know, and you have not even answered him. There is some motive for it, as there is for your absence, which surprises all of us; as there is also a motive in your refusal to demand my hand—from my father."

"Annette, I have told you," murmured Gaston Lapierre.

"You have told me that you were too poor for me—that you were without position; that, through love for me, and through respect for yourself, you ought not to expose yourself to a refusal; that, even admitting a refusal was not to be feared, as I affirmed to you, you wished to wait until the difference of fortune and position, which separates us, was not so great."

"That is true. Am I not right?"

"You might be right if a marriage of convenience and interest was proposed. When it is one of love, one does not reason! Do I reason? Is this reasonable, my presence here and the step I have taken? the uneasiness and despair I exhibit to you? this forgetting of all my pride, all my feelings, all the delicacy of a young girl, which urges me to do that which you ought to do, to change, to reverse our positions?"

While thus speaking, a fleeting blush mounted to her cheeks, and tears—tears of spite and almost of anger—filled her handsome eyes.

"Annette, don't overwhelm me, don't be cruel, unjust," cried the young man, falling on his knees before her, seizing her hands and kissing them with a transport of passion which reassured Annette more than any protestations could have done.

"Oh! if you only knew how unhappy I am, how I suffer!" he continued. "It is enough to kill me, do you see—and I have felt twenty times in the last eight days an extravagant inclination, an irresistible desire to blow out my brains."

"Why?" said Annette, terrified.

"You are right," replied Gaston, carried away by his emotions; "all the reasonable things which you reproach me with having said to you, haven't common sense—yes, I love you enough to pass over all the obstacles which separate us, to despise, forget and ignore them! I am poor and have no position in the world, and you are rich and a duke's daughter. What does it matter? Love does not stop before such considertions. I love you so much that I would, if necessary, have trampled under foot my most legitimate pride, happy only at being with you and having you with me. Besides, if I am poor to-day, and without a name, to-morrow I may be rich and have a future. I feel within me the strength as well as the will to conquer that which I now lack, to conquer a place worthy of us both, in society. I believe I have talent—I can say that much to you without vanity, can I not? If I had not felt myself somebody, should I have ever dared to lift my eyes to you? I know, or rather I feel, that your father would not have repulsed me. He suspects our love—he knows it—it has shown in our eyes—and he has not driven me away. The duchess, also, has become more sympathetic and friendly towards me. The duke has written me a letter full of affability and affection, a paternal letter, complaining of my absence, and asking me to come and have a talk with him. Yes, I have only to hold out my hand, Annette, and you would be mine."

At these last words Gaston stopped.

The sobs which were tearing his breast suddenly butst forth, and he concealed his face on Annette's lap, in order to try and suppress his tears.

Annette turned pale and softly raised his head, and seeking the young man's eyes with her own, she said to him:

"So there is a motive which you have not told me. Then I was not mistaken?"

"Yes," said the young man, with a motion of his head.

"It must be a very grave one."

"It is terrible."

"I desire to know it."

"I cannot tell it."

Annette arose.

"Why?" asked she, much agitated.

Gaston was still kneeling and holding her hand, almost in an attitude of guilt, like a man who implored pity and pardon.

"Why?" she repeated.

"It is a secret—which is not mine alone—and which I have not the right to reveal."

"Not even to me?"

He was silent.

Annette looked at him, pensive, and as if absorbed in some deep and internal anguish.

"Hold!" violently replied the young man. "I am a wretch—I ought not to love you—I haven't the right—for I ought to know—that you cannot be my wife—or bear my name. . ."

He gave a shudder of horror as he pronounced these words.

"I have been cowardly and selfish—I have forgotten all . . . I have listened to, followed, my passion, in place of crushing it in my heart, even though it should kill me. I would die now, only I would die guilty of having made you unhappy, poor child—you, whom I love more than my life, and for whom I would gladly and joyfully give my heart's blood!"

"Ah! you cannot give me your name?" finally said Annette in a curious tone, and as if she had only heard this part of all her lover's speech.

"I cannot—it is impossible! Yes, impossible!"

For about half a minute she hesitated.

Gaston remained silent.

He had taken the young girl's small hands and placed them over his eyes, not daring to look at her, yet still wishing to feel her presence; fearing to see her, wounded at the heart as she must be, irritated and indignant at him; saying to himself, with that madness of hope which inspires every sincere and violent passion, that all was not lost, so long as she did not repulse him.

All at once Annette took her resolution.

"Gaston," said she, "I only wish to ask you one question, one only—but to that I want an answer—and you will give me one, if you are a man of honor."

He trembled.

She had withdrawn her hands, forcing him to raise his head.

She was leaning forward, looking straight into his eyes.

"I do not ask your secret of you," she said to him. "I demand to know this: Does the grave and terrible motive which forever prevents you from giving me your name concern the duke; yes or no?"

While speaking she had assumed such a strange expression, and had become so pale, her voice trembled so much, her glance contained such anguish and suddenly revealed such a deep source of concealed sufferings, that Gaston, almost forgetting his own troubles, regarded her with unspeakable surprise.

CHAPTER XIV.

SON AND DAUGHTER.

ANNETTE took his silence and surprise for hesitation.

"Ah! it is really he who is concerned, isn't it? It is on his account!" cried she, violently.

"Certainly not, Annette; I do not even understand your question. Your father is the best of men; he has always treated me kindly, and I have already told you that if nothing was in question but considerations of fortune and title, but the fear of a check from him—I would not have recoiled before a step which I have so much at heart. Do you believe that through vanity, or even through dignified pride, I would have had the courage to fill your beautiful

eyes with tears and cause you the slightest suffering or uneasiness?"

It was curious to watch the young girl's expression during this response of Gaston.

She had almost passed from menace and violence to defiance; then, as Gaston's sincere and astonished air proved that she was mistaken, a sort of regret for what she had said appeared on her pretty face, without completely effacing from it the trace of a persistent mental reservation, but which she no longer wished to express, which, in fact, she forced herself to conceal, without being absolutely able to attain the end she desired.

"Ah!" said she, in a calmer voice, "it is from your side, your side alone, that the obstacle comes?"

"Yes!" said he, lowering his head and blushing.

"And is this obstacle connected with you, yourself, or some one else?"

"With me?—I have nothing but you and my love for you—as you very well know."

"Then it is *not* you? Does some one oppose us?"

"Do not question me, Annette. I beg you, do not question me! If you knew what torture you impose on me——"

"Well! and I, am I not unhappy?" interrupted she, with an accent of heroic bravado and raising her head with a defiant air. "I have told you that I cannot live thus—I must know——"

"And I, I cannot speak," he replied, with gloomy resolution.

"Is it your mother?" she continued, pursuing her investigation, without allowing herself to be turned from the main subject.

"My mother? Oh, heavens, no! My mother loves me more than her life; and she has not been able to see you, seldom as it has been, without admiring and loving you, as do all who come near you."

"Your father is dead. Then—I do not understand——"

On hearing his father mentioned Gaston shuddered,

and hastily interrupting her, said in a supplicating voice:

"You cannot understand—you ought not to—I do not wish it."

Annette bruskly moved away from him.

"Very good—adieu!" she said, starting towards the door.

"Annette!" cried Gaston, in despair, "do you no longer love me?"

She stopped, but without answering.

"Do you hate me? Do you despise and hate me? Ah! don't quit me thus!"

He had thrown himself before her, taken her in his arms and pressed her to his breast. He was trembling and agitated to a degree that was pitiable.

Annette softly pushed him away.

"What can I do here, henceforth?" she replied. "And what matters it whether I love you or not? Is not all ended between us? What can we hope and what can we say? Does not an insurmountable obstacle, which you do not wish to make known to me, and which I might be able to help you remove, separate us?"

"You are very cruel, Annette, without suspecting it."

"Yes, I am very cruel!—I come to find you, to beg you not to renounce me, to do what is necessary to make me your wife; I come to give you the most complete and compromising proof of my love, without stopping to think of any consideration which should have stopped me. I come to say to you: 'Gaston, I am unhappy. I had no mother in my childhood, as I have none in my youth. I have lived alone and in myself, deprived of those tender and deep affections of which I have had only unrealized dreams and unsatisfied longings. Be all to me—my husband, my happiness, and my family!'"

"I believed that you loved the duchess, who seems to love you with all her heart," said Gaston, in order to escape the pain these reproaches caused him and the weakness they awakened in him.

"Yes, she loves me. She is good, and I love her much. But that is not my mother!"

"You have your father!"

"The duke!" said she, "yes, the duke ——"

She stopped, and all her firmness suddenly disappeared, and her large, brilliant eyes filled with tears.

"Oh! how I suffer! my God! how I suffer!" she cried.

"Annette!" interrupted Gaston, "you do not tell me all, either. There is something in your words that I do not understand. Explain yourself."

"And why should I not have my secret?" she replied, quickly drying her tears; "have not you yours?"

"If I should tell you mine, would you tell me yours?" asked the young man in a low voice, and as if ashamed of the hesitation he felt.

"No!" said she, energetically. "Besides," she went on, rapidly, "I have no secret. I am a fool, that is all!"

"Oh! I have even lost your confidence!" murmured Gaston, perhaps more grievously afflicted now than he had been since the commencement of this long and painful scene.

Annette made no reply.

"Well, listen," he went on, transported by the solicitude of his love. "I have told you the secret I conceal from you is not mine—it is—my mother's. I—I will ask her to let me tell you all—and then—then—you will despise me, perhaps, you will look upon me with horror—you will be the first to say to me: 'All happiness is impossible between us'—but, at least, you will not doubt my heart, and you will understand to what a degree I love you—by avowing what I shall avow—by revealing to you what I shall reveal?"

"But why have you never spoken to me of it before to-day?" demanded the young girl. "Is it because this secret, this obstacle, did not exist before the last eight days?"

"Yes, for that reason I hesitated and delayed the hour of our happiness. But within eight days a new

event has occurred which has opened an abyss beneath me—into which I dare not draw you—even though I should die of despair and remorse at your feet. As to the rest, when you know—if I obtain permission to tell you—you shall decide for yourself. But, Annette, death would be sweet to me in comparison with the avowal I shall have to make to you! And you will perhaps regret having compelled me to make it."

"Gaston," she said to him, with a sudden change of tone and feelings such as had already happened to her several times during this interview, "you shall have nothing to regret nor to blush for before me. I am wrong. I make you suffer, under the pretext that I suffer—it is selfish and wicked. Forgive me!"

She held forward her forehead, and he with a respectful passion, pressed his burning lips to it.

"Only swear that you love me as much as ever, and I will believe you."

"Annette, I swear it to you! Besides, do you not see it in my anguish?"

"Yes, I see it. Well, then, nothing is lost!"

"Alas!"

"You love me, I love you! Is there anything against that?"

"No; but happiness may be forbidden to us!"

"Not that of always loving. I will wait——"

"For what?"

"Who knows? The future is long. It will not be eternally against us! Return to the duke, as in the past."

Gaston gave a slight shudder.

"I do not wish to change my music teacher," added she, with a smile which died away into tears.

"You are as good as you are beautiful," murmured he, kissing Annette's long eyelashes, in order to drink the tears there, with a joy mixed with bitterness—joy at feeling himself thus loved—bitterness at making weep the one whom he loved with such a consuming and exclusive passion.

"Yes," he went on, "I will see the duke. He has written to me—and I must speak to him—it is my

duty—a frightful duty—like all my present duties—but I would be guilty if I did not ——"

Annette regarded him with astonishment.

"Stop, my beloved—this I can tell you—I will always tell you all I *can*—but do not ask me anything more—do not exact an explanation which I ought to refuse ——"

"What is the matter?"

"You can even aid me, in this circumstance, and you can obtain, or find a way of bringing about, that which I desire—that which must be done."

Gaston, pale as he had been, now became livid, and it was with lowered eyes, and in a trembling voice that he added:

"Bernard, the steward, is always at the duke's—at your father's?"

Annette raised her long eyelashes, and quickly lowered them again, a familiar movement when she had received any violent shock.

"Yes," she said. "Well?"

"Well, your father, who has great confidence in him, must be induced to part with him, to send him away."

A cold sweat bathed the young man's forehead; his words came brokenly and abruptly from his blanched lips.

Annette, becoming suddenly as motionless and cold as a statue, regarded him fixedly.

"And why?" said she, slowly, without letting her glance leave him.

"He—does not merit that—confidence—I believe. In short, Annette, I swear to you that he must leave—your house."

Annette seized his hand, saying, in a low voice, but with a flash in her eyes, filled with an extraordinary light, about which there was something threatening, almost ferocious:

"Gaston, you have deceived me!"

"I?"

"Yes, you, just now. It *was* then a question of my father—of the duke?"

"What do you see in common between your father and this—this man—this Bernard— his steward?"

His accent expressed such sincere astonishment that Annette, after having still regarded him for an instant, extinguished the light of her glance under the veil of her quickly lowered eyelids.

"In fact, nothing!" she replied, in a constrained and agitated voice. "But I cannot charge myself with this. Speak of it yourself to the duke. Adieu!"

And, without giving him time to prevent her, she hastened out of the room, swiftly traversed the corridor, opened the main door, and disappeared in the darkness.

When Gaston, who had hastened after her, arrived at the landing she was out of sight, and all he could hear of her was the rustling of her dress as she descended the stairs.

He re-entered his apartments staggering, exhausted and in despair, and fell to pieces, so to speak, on a chair, feeling nothing but the sensation of an immense grief, which was breaking his heart.

It was thus that his mother found him a half hour later, on her return.

On lifting his eyes to her he was stupefied, so greatly altered and agitated were the features of the unhappy woman.

"What is it?" cried he, recovering himself the better to consider her. "Some new evil, is it not?"

"No! no!" she murmured. "Nothing. I swear to you——"

She could not finish. She staggered and fell unconscious into her son's arms.

CHAPTER XV.

TWO WOMEN.

ON leaving the house in Trois-Couronnes street, where she had had this painful explanation with Gaston, Annette found awaiting her before the door the hack in which she had come.

She rapidly turned the handle of the door and threw herself into the carriage, after having said to the coachman:

"Avenue de Neuilly! Quick!"

But scarcely had she seated herself when she felt two arms quietly embrace her. She uttered a slight cry of terror, and tried to disembarrass herself of this restraint, in order to lean out of the window and cry for help.

A tender and well-known voice did not give her time.

"Miss Imprudence!" it said in her ear, "do you not recognize me? It is I!"

"You!" cried Annette, passing from terror to spite, and angrily repulsing her who had spoken.

"Yes, I, Jeanne, your best friend, as you very well know."

"Oh! you have acted meanly!" replied Annette, in an irritated voice; "to spy upon me thus!"

"Annette, I am not spying upon you. I am watching over you to protect you from the imprudences into which your nervousness and wrong-headedness may lead you—and which perhaps some day you may regret."

"What is it to you?"

The young duchess pretended not to hear, and continued:

"No, I am not spying upon you, and the proof of it is that in place of going up to *his* apartment, where I knew that you were, I waited, concealed in this carriage, until you should come down."

"That is the worst of it!" replied Annette. "If you *had* come up-stairs, I would at least have known that you were there."

"And *he*, too, would have known it, and that I did not wish! You are a bad girl, Annette, but you are also an honest one, on whom one can rely, and I knew you were guarded better, up there by yourself, than anyone else could have guarded you."

These last words appeared to slightly appease Annette, who replied, in a mollified tone:

"Then why follow me?"

"So that we might return to your father's together; in order that he might not suspect where you came from or where you had gone alone—a very strange proceeding, you will ackowledge—on the part of a young girl of your age."

Annette was silent; but she no longer repulsed her step-mother.

"For some days I have noticed your agitation," continued the little duchess. "I have seen the badly effaced traces of your tears. I know your eyes, so soft when you wish, sometimes so threatening, in which all your emotions are reflected. I saw in them the signs of an increasing storm, some dangerous crisis. You avoided me, no longer spoke to me, and sought solitude, as if you needed counsel and hesitated; as if you meditated an inconsiderate act in regard to which you would not allow yourself to be turned aside. This evening, during dinner, I divined that you had come to some resolution. Seeing nothing of you I sought you in your room, in the garden. You were not to be found. Then I came out, took a carriage and was driven to Trois-Couronnes street. *This* carriage stood before a particular door. I interrogated the coachman, and found that he had brought a young lady there whom he was waiting for. I sent away my own carriage and entered yours. We can return together

to the duke's in the presence of the servants. It will be supposed that we both went out for a drive, and all will be well! What do you see about this that is so wicked? Is this spying?"

"Forgive me," murmured Annette, violently embracing her. "I have been wicked—that is often the case with me—but you are so good! Ah! if you only knew how unhappy I am!"

"I do know it, my poor dear. At your age, and, I believe, at all ages, for certain women, the sufferings of love and of the heart are the greatest sufferings—but do not forget that a mere nothing compromises a young girl, that it may lose her in the world's eyes, and that the evil, once done, nothing can cure or efface it!"

"I could not remain thus—I no longer saw him—I should have become mad."

"You are already slightly so, with your romantic nature, your character at once violent and close, at times almost cunning, and which suddenly goes to extremes, passing from the most unjust reserve towards those who ought to have your confidence, to the most incautious unreserve. You are proud and passionate, susceptible and hasty, Annette; you are at the age when one is both egotistical and devoted. You are, taken altogether, capable of making those who love you die of grief, and of killing yourself for those to whom you have given your heart. All this is very dangerous."

"For whom?"

"For yourself and others."

"To hear you speak one would think you had the experience of a woman of sixty," replied the young girl.

"No, my dear, I am not sixty—only twenty-eight—and I have only been married a year. But I was an orphan; I was poor, without hope for the future. I have always known that I had no one to depend on but myself; and, as no one had any interest in flattering me, neither as a child or a young girl, I was always very bluntly told a lot of truths which have taught

me to reflect, to see clearly in regard to myself and others. But we will pass over that; you love me, in spite of your revolts; I love you in spite of your wrong-headedness. We are two friends. We have enough time; so tell me everything."

While speaking, Jeanne had taken Annette's head between her hands and had kindly embraaced her.

Annette, at first a little stiff and reserved, but finally overcome by this kindness, mixed with frankness, returned the other's caress, being one of those persons who do not get angry at being told certain truths, which they know they deserve, when these truths prove that the speaker of them really loves the one to whom they are addressed.

"Heavens!" replied she, with emotion, "you have known for some time that we love each other."

"Yes. And as I have much sympathy and esteem for him; as I, myself poor, have married a rich man; as I know that love recognizes neither differences of fortune nor of rank; that true happiness consists in being mated, and that I wish you to be happy, like myself, I have never been opposed to this love affair—which I have rather encouraged, without mixing myself up in it any more than you would have wished, or than you would have permitted."

"That is true. But I know that the duke would not be opposed to it, thanks to you—and to his indifference for me—even before you told me that it was agreed upon between you both, and that he had written to Gaston to appoint an interview ——"

"Seeing you so uneasy and unhappy at the prolonged and inexplicable absence of M. Lapierre, I was weak enough to tell you that your father consented and wished to make the first advances—in place of leaving it as a surprise to you—it is true. But what is not true, is the indifference with which you reproach your father, and his pretended coldness towards you; your coldness creates his, and he suffers from it, I assure you; you were a grown-up girl when you saw him again, two years ago. You did not remember him, being too young, when circumstances

separated you. There had to be some embarrassment between you, who were, in short, strangers to each other ——"

"Besides," dryly interrupted Annette, "one does not care much for the daughter—when one did not love the mother!"

"You deceive yourself!" kindly said Jeanne, but with a certain embarrassment. "But let us leave that part of the subject. And besides, your heart is one of those which cannot be forced, and which submits to no law. Let us return to M. Lapierre."

"Yes, we will return to him. Eh, well! he does not want me!" said she, with a violent flood of tears.

"But that is impossible—explain yourself. What has happened?"

"What has happened ever since we knew each other. He appears to love me, to love me with all his heart—and I believe that he would give his life for me ——"

"Well?"

"But he will not give me his name."

"Annette, you are talking nonsense! You have misunderstood hesitations, fears, and susceptibilities proceeding from the great inferiority of his position as compared with yours. You must have said something harsh to him, you have been snappish, provoking ——"

"With him, no, never!" replied the young girl. "Near him, I no longer recognize myself. He might beat me, and it seems to me that I could kiss his hands."

"Strange girl!" softly murmured the duchess.

"So it is not that," continued Annette, in a sadder tone. "There is something, or rather *some one*, between us, who keeps us apart."

"Some one? He has told you so?"

"Yes."

"And who is it?"

"Who?—Ah, there—he would not tell me."

"And you do not suspect?"

"No!" said Annette, in a singular tone which struck Jeanne.

She opened her mouth to question, to demand the cause of this particular accent which gave birth to a thousand vague ideas in her own mind and made her believe that Annette had not been sincere in her last answer; but she remained silent, judging that perhaps it might be imprudent to attempt too fast and too soon to read this heart which so quickly closed itself in the presence of all inquiries, and which only opened of its own accord, when its susceptibilities or caprices were not touched.

"But, nevertheless, you insist?" she replied.

"Yes, even more than I should have done, than I would have believed myself capable of doing."

"That is strange," said the little duchess. "But he is young and loving, like yourself; he doubtless exaggerates things—and gives wayto despair at the first obstacle."

"Then he could not have been a man, and could never have loved me enough," proudly answered Annette; "and, in that case, I could not have loved him. I could never love him."

"So, you do not doubt him?"

"No!" resolutely replied Annette, who, if she had doubted him, would not, through pride, have readily acknowledged it.

"This obstacle is serious, frightful and insurmountable," she added with a shudder, which Jeanne felt in the darkness, without being able to understand the exact character of it, as she could not see the expression on the other's face.

"How do you know it is, since you are unacquainted with it?"

"I know it—to the sorrow of both of us."

"Nevertheless, will he not return? The duke wrote to him ——"

"Yes, he will return."

"The duke should speak to him—offer him your hand—make him explain himself."

"*To him!*" cried Annette.

"Certainly; he will be constrained to give his motives, to tell his secret."

"He will tell the duke nothing," sneered the young girl.

Jeanne leaned towards her to try and see her face, not understanding this ironical accent, which frightened her. She touched Annette. The latter was crying.

"Come, my dear, calm yourself, you are too nervous," she said, not wishing to appear as much disturbed as she really was. "At your age one exaggerates everything, and that is where you are wrong, for there is a bright future before you. You love each other, you are sure of your hearts; isn't that a great thing?"

These were almost the same words that Annette had said to Gaston, now repeated to her by her father's wife. But Annette made no reply and continued weeping, leaning on the duchess' shoulder, and shaking her head in child-like despair; a very rare thing with her.

"Now listen," continued Jeanne. "Haven't you confidence in me? I will speak to him—and will certainly get the truth out of him."

But Annette violently aroused herself.

"No, no, never!" she cried, with an accent of terror and almost of menace. "You? No, I do not wish it! I forbid you to! Do you hear? I forbid it! I would rather kill myself!"

Whence came this sudden violence and irritated fright? Was it the pride of a young girl who revolted at the idea that the man she loved would tell another woman what he had refused to tell *her?*

Had Annette any other reason for fearing Jeanne's becoming Gaston's confidant?

This is what the duchess uneasily asked herself, without being exactly able to divine the truth, only feeling that perhaps there was in the affair some reservation or mystery graver than she had at first suspected.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOPELESSNESS.

IT is now necessary for us to go back some hours to the middle of this same day, in order to understand Madame Lapierre's state of excitement on her return to her home, and the causes of the sudden weakness which made her fall unconscious into her son's arms.

About half-past twelve, when she and her son were finishing their modest luncheon, the janitor had brought her a letter, come by the morning's post, in an unknown hand, and bearing the Paris post-mark.

This letter contained the following lines:

"Madame Lapierre will please call this evening, at eight o'clock, at the house of Madame de Los Rios, No. — Cuvier Street, concerning an affair which interests the former, and may prove eminently useful and profitable to her.

"She will, also, please have the kindness to bring with her some samples of her linen work, Madame de Los Rios being unable to leave her house."

Madame Lapierre passed this letter to her son, who, after reading it over, said:

"Shall you go?"

"Certainly; it must be some stranger. And perhaps it is in regard to some important and lucrative order. We are not rich enough to refuse such a chance."

"Oh! what does that matter *now?*" murmured the young man, with an expression of bitter despair.

"Gaston," she said, taking his hands in hers, and

clasping them affectionately, "I understand your griefs—and I share them—but we must not give up to them. Let us strive to do our duty; yes, this unforseen return of a man whose name I do not wish to pronounce—this return, which reveals to us at one and the same time his existence and the commission of new crimes, which overpowers us with the threat of some frightful revelation, which opens under our feet an abyss of blood and of filth, wounded me, at first, like it did you; more on your account than on mine, believe me. What matters it to *me?* It is for *you* that I have worked; in order to assure your future, and also to make it as happy, sweet, and brilliant as possible; in that I have found strength to resist cruel and frightful trials. My hopes are only in the charms and joys of your future. The mother has survived the wife, and she is courageous for the sake of her only child——"

"I know it—and I thank you for it!" interrupted the young man—"but you see that all this was useless. We are cursed! fate bears hard upon us. What future remains to me? Is this living—this constant trembling before threatening shame? Only owing the small position we occupy in the world, the consideration we have conquered there, to an eternal falsehood, concealing our true name and position like criminals?"

"Now, what is going to happen? Besides the reality, there is mystery! Somebody entered my room, and effaced from it all traces of the passage—of that man!—Who has done this? And why has he done it?"

Madame Lapierre uttered a low groan, but otherwise remained silent, not wishing to dwell upon this which caused them such great terror.

Gaston continued:

"It occasionally seems to me that I am a thief, a thief of public esteem, and sometimes I have had an almost irresistible impulse to cry out to those who extend their hands to me, who open their doors and hearts to me: 'Take care, I am the son of a forger, an

assassin, my father has been condemned to the galleys, from which he escaped: and one can follow his trace by the blood he sheds! He is a wild animal who has broken out of his cage—who threatens and kills. I know him, yet I am silent!—I am his accomplice—and I have my share in all his crimes and infamies!' "

"Gaston, be silent, I conjure you! You drive me to despair!"

And the unhappy woman looked around in anguish, as if she feared the walls had ears to hear; although at this hour she and her son were alone, her working-women having gone to their noon-day meal.

"Yes—I will be silent—forgive me! I am not always master of myself. You have told me that, when I was an infant, rendered almost frantic by the misconduct and bad treatment of—of my father!—forseeing what he would become, and the ignoble shame of the future, you took me in your arms and fled in order to throw yourself into the Seine with me, and by death save us both from infamy. Ah! why did you not do it?"

"Gaston, my child! my poor child!" murmured the mother. "I believed I could make life supportable to you."

"I would not have known Annette," continued the young man, pursuing his idea and returning to the passion which filled and tortured his heart. "We would not have loved each other—and to-day I would not be compelled to fly from her—to conceal myself from her, without daring, or being able to explain to her the cause of this conduct—which is killing me—and will make her hate and despise me——"

He arose and walked rapidly up and down, exclaiming:

"Oh! it is abominable. *He* is at her father's—this murderer!—this criminal, capable of anything. He has gone back there, through us. I am certain of it; to the house of Annette's father, who has faith in him. And if he should rob, despoil, or, perhaps assassinate the duke, would not his blood be upon my head? Can I leave this danger suspended over the heads of these

people, who have received, welcomed and encouraged me, and treated me almost like a son? Over the heads of this honest man, his adorable and good wife, and, finally, Annette—Annette, whom I love? It *is* abominable! infamous! cowardly! And I am not courageous enough to go and tell them the truth. And, besides, should a son denounce his father? Have I the right to ruin *you* in unmasking *him?* Can I possibly send *him* to the scaffold? It drives me mad!"

"Gaston," again murmured his mother, whose deeply-furrowed face only too plainly showed what she had suffered during the last eight days, although she tried to hide it from her son, "without telling the duke the whole truth, you can put him on his guard, and get him to discharge his steward."

"Yes, and Bernard, the steward, with no home, and out of position, not knowing how to live, would return and demand an asylum from us, as he has threatened to do; or commit some new crime through which he would be discovered and captured ——"

"Do you want *me* to speak to the duke?" said the mother, in a trembling voice.

"No—no!" cried Gaston, in terror.

He doubtless feared that she would disclose the entire secret; and, with that unreasoning hope, which never abandons the unhappy, he figured to himself that so long as the truth remained unknown Annette was not altogether lost to him. But how? He knew nothing about it. Could he marry her? No.

In his position what father would give him his daughter? Did honor even permit him to make an offer of his soiled and infamous name—although the sullying and infamy were not personally his—to any young girl whatever, although her parents and she, herself, might consent to accept it?

No—a thousand times no!

Nevertheless, he wished to be the only one to speak. To speak when he chose, and as he pleased; to choose the as yet undetermined means by which he would protect this loved and revered family from all dangers, without having to make an avowal, above all to An-

nette, the very idea of which filled him with an insurmountable horror.

Madame Lapierre understood these vague and undefined sentiments, with the instinct of a woman and a mother, for she kindly answered:

"Act as you please, Gaston. I know you, and I am sure that you will do your duty—your whole duty."

"Yes—yes," he replied, with agitation, "the duke has written to me. My absence disturbs and surprises him. For eight days I have not dared to show myself, or re-enter that house—where I have known Annette—where she expects me!"

His emotion overcame him, and he let himself fall into a chair with a movement of heartrending despair.

His mother looked at him, hesitating to speak to him or to approach him, understanding the futility of her consolations, and even of her tenderness. At this critical moment she was as despairing as he was, even more so, for she suffered on her own account and on his, blaming herself because she was able to do nothing for him, not even to die.

"Listen!" continued Gaston, in a half choked voice, "I am sure the duke would have given me his daughter! It seems absurd and foolish, but it is true. He knew of our love, as did also the duchess—what a saint she is! And he did not drive me away, but received me with an affection which elated me and wrung my heart at one and the same time. Oh! how unhappy I am! how unhappy I am!"

"Let us see!" said his mother. "Listen to me, Gaston. After all, what difference is there between now and eight days ago? Had n't you then the same father? Had n't I the same husband?"

She spoke without conviction and from maternal weakness, trying to throw a little balm on this wound, which was bleeding before her, and whose blood was dearer to her than her own.

"What difference is there? Everything!" said he, in a somber voice. "Yes, I was his son then as well as now. But he had disappeared—he was far off. He

was perhaps dead or lost in some American desert. Twenty years had passed over his crimes. He was not here, near us, in Paris, with Annette's father! red-handed, with a fresh murder. I was already a coward for having loved under the circumstances that then surrounded us, and for allowing anyone to love me. I suffered dreadfully then. I recoiled every day before an explanation which frightened me. To-day, I am horrified at myself. Either an accomplice or a parricide! that is my situation, my dilemma! Infamy holds me, enchains me. Without you I would have already blown out my brains."

Madame Lapierre uttered a feeble groan.

She was so pale, appeared so broken and her eyes contained so much grief and compassionate tenderness that Gaston, forgetting himself for a moment, pitied her. He went up to her, seized her in his arms, and said:

"Forgive me, mother, forgive me. I am cruel, odious! It is wicked! I torture you. You remain to me, don't you? That ought to, and shall, suffice me. But I suffer! and I make you suffer!"

At that moment the bell rang.

The working-women had returned.

Mother and son had to separate and remain silent.

Gaston went up to his room in the garret, where he usually worked, but he neither touched his music nor his piano; and, motionless, his head concealed in his hands, he remained there until night.

When he came down in the evening his mother had gone out, but she had left the following note for him:

"I am going to the house of the lady from whom I heard this morning. I will return in an hour."

The poor woman had not dared to see him again, feeling her inability to console him, and wishing to preserve an appearance of coolness while dealing with her new client, whom she did not wish to lose. She said to herself, that Gaston, feeling so despondent, would perhaps not work long, and therefore she must work

all the more, in order to prevent his being troubled with the ordinary household worries.

Exactly at eight o'clock she rang at Madame de Los Rios' door.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SWORD OF DAMOCLES.

CARMENCITA came to the door.

"Madame de Los Rios?" demanded Madame Lapierre.

"This is her house. You are, doubtless, Madame Lapierre?"

"Yes."

"Will you please to walk in? My mistress expects you."

Madame Lapierre followed the little maid, who conducted her through the dining-room and drawing-room, which were in a state of almost complete darkness, to the private boudoir where Dolores spent most of her time.

The *China** raised a curtain, and the visitor, blinded by the flood of light in which she suddenly found herself, stood hesitating, and unable to distinguish anything, at the entrance.

The creole, half lying, according to her custom, in an easy-chair facing the door, had time for a rapid inspection of the new-comer.

Her black eyes went over the other's figure and analyzed her from head to foot with that quickness belonging to women, and which Dolores possessed to an extraordinary degree.

The preliminary examination was doubtless satisfactory, for she smiled and said, in a sweet voice, to Madame Lapierre, while pointing her to a low chair near her own, but placed directly under a lamp

* Pronounced *Tchina*.

whose light was greatly increased by a powerful reflector:

"Please take a seat, madame;—we will have a chat."

Carmencita had already disappeared and was in one of the most distant rooms with Mono, who had received orders to keep out of Madame Lapierre's way, and not let her see him.

Gaston's mother bowed, advanced, and took the seat indicated, without laying aside the small box she carried in her hand, which contained some specimens of the linen-work she had brought with her at the request of Madame de Los Rios.

Now that she was accustomed to the bright light of the boudoir she could, in turn, look at the person who had written to her, and whose close scrutiny she had felt was just now upon herself. She was extremely surprised at the striking beauty, foreign air and costume of Dolores.

The latter wore a black satin dress, with a close-fitting body, short sleeves, and cut very low in the neck. From the top of her head, where it was fastened by a long gold pin, descended a black lace veil, which formed a kind of drapery, and mixed its pliant and supple folds with the vivid reflections of the shining silk, and the dead whiteness of the bare skin.

This is the usual costume of the *Portena* when she is dressed for receiving or for going out.

Of a rich and bold simplicity, it is admirably suited to creole women. It gives prominence to the elegance of their round and magnificent figures, to the brilliancy of their creamy complexions, and the remarkable softness of their large eyes, which shine like black diamonds, through the light waves of the open lace.

Madame Lapierre had never seen anything so original and charming, and her first feeling was one of astonished admiration.

But this did not last, and uneasiness succeeded,

almost instantly, this first impression—an uneasiness caused by the gaze of Dolores.

This look, indeed, had something so deep and investigating about it, differing so much from the casual glance that a woman in Madame de Los Rios' apparent position would cast upon a stranger, upon a dress-maker whose skill she wished to prove, from whom she desired some special piece of work, that Madame Lapierre trembled and all at once felt herself possessed with secret fear and painful apprehension. Meanwhile Madame de Los Rios was not a French woman, not a Parisian, at all events. She had never seen her; she therefore must be absolutely unknown to her. What had she to fear on her own part?

This reflection somewhat reassured her.

One can readily understand that in her position the least unusual circumstance appeared threatening; and awakened fears, constantly repressed, but always ready to reappear.

She made an effort to escape from the kind of fascination she experienced from those large, dark eyes, fixed obstinately upon her, and, seeing that Madame de Los Rios did not commence the conversation, she hastened to say to her:

"In conformance with the letter which you did me the honor to write to me, madame, I have brought some linen samples with me."

Dolores listened to her, as she had looked at her, with profound attention, under which one who had intimately known the creole, could have discovered a real surprise and a slight embarrassment.

Madame Lapierre, indeed, whom we have not yet had time to present in detail to our readers, bore, about her whole person, a stamp of distinction which was astonishing in a woman of her apparent position.

Everything about her, despite the simplicity and plainness of her costume; despite the marks that age, bodily and mental sufferings and the necessities of a working-woman's existence had left upon her features,

seemed to indicate that she had received a superior education.

She expressed herself without affectation, in well chosen terms, and her wrinkled face, crowned with grey hair, spoke vaguely of another woman overcome by her life, but who must have been beautiful, charming and intelligent.

She was large, very thin, less from temperament than as a result of struggles and griefs which had enfeebled and almost emaciated her. She had an oval face, long nose and very soft, sweet eyes. Her expressive mouth would have had a becoming smile, had not all smiles been chased away long ago, and painful preoccupations given to her an expression which, at the first glance, passed for being severe.

Her voice, too, had nothing vulgar, obsequious or shrill about it, as is generally the case with persons who deal with the public and must try to please.

All this struck Dolores and made a certain impression upon her, from which she wished to escape. From this proceeded the hesitation she felt at commencing on the delicate subject which she wished to speak of with this woman. Still, she must act quickly. She felt this, and took her resolution.

Madame Lapierre appeared intelligent and timid, with the timidity of one whom misery and disappointment had broken, and Dolores thought that the simplest way was to take the bull by the horns in the *pampa* fashion, and thus overcome her by the rapidity of the attack.

While speaking Madame Lapierre had commenced to open her box.

"That is useless," bruskly said Dolores. "It is not in regard to those things that I have asked you to come and see me."

Madame Lapierre raised her surprised eyes to her interlocutor.

"As I have told you," pursued the creole, "we have much more important things to converse of—and which nearly concerns us both."

"I am at your service, madame," replied the other;

"but I cannot understand, I acknowledge, how we are mutually interested outside of my work."

"Yes, that must astonish you.—I am a stranger.—I left America some little time since. I have only been in Paris a few months. We have never met or seen each other before; and it is likely that we never shall meet again. So you need not seek to understand, for you would never be able to read the riddle. You have your secrets, I have mine. If you respect mine, and you cannot do otherwise, I will respect yours. The conversation we are about to have can be finished in one moment.—It depends on you. I have only one question to put to you. Answer it without reticence and frankly, and all will be over between us."

These words were pronounced in a dry, short and almost threatening tone, calculated to add trouble to the other's already aching heart.

Madame Lapierre had turned pale. She felt some terrible blow approaching.

The language of Madame de Los Rios seemed to contain allusions which terrified her.

Wishing to conceal an emotion which might betray her, in case she had misunderstood, she remained silent, simply interrogating with a look the strange woman with whom she found herself face to face.

"Your silence," continued Dolores, "proves to me that you know to what I allude."

"No! madame, I am entirely ignorant of it," responded Madame Lapierre, recovering her firmness before the imminence of danger of which she had a presentiment, but the vagueness of which left her undecided and unprepared.

"Then you shall learn it."

Dolores slowly became upright; and, leaning forward, continued in a low voice:

"I only wish to know from you what has become of Louis Clermont, or where he has taken refuge?"

Madame Lapierre quickly arose. She was livid.

"Louis Clermont!" she muttered, "I don't know what you mean, madame."

Her voice became stronger, although she felt ready to fall to the floor.

"I do not know the person," she continued.

"I almost expected this answer," Dolores said, coldly, "but your denials are useless—and you shall speak—because I wish it."

"Madame, I haven't anything to say, and I cannot understand the tone you take with me."

Saying these words, the unhappy woman, turning around so that her terror might not be seen, directed her steps towards the door.

"Madame Clermont," softly said Dolores, "don't go away thus: you will regret it, as well as your son!"

The mother stopped where she was, and violently turned about.

"My son!" she repeated, with the cry of a lioness who feels her offspring in danger.

"Seat yourself, madame," replied the creole, "and do not look at me with such threatening eyes, which would kill me if they had the power. I do not wish any evil to you nor yours. I only wish some information; and I will have it. Hear me with calmness, and answer only one question; that is all I ask of you."

Madame Lapierre had returned near Dolores. She again let herself fall into the chair she had quitted a few moments before.

"You see," said her interlocutor, "that I am well informed, and that it is useless to trifle with me. I know all. I tell you, I have you in my power. I have but to say a word to reveal the secret you have so carefully concealed for twenty years. You would not like for me to speak—on your own account, and above all, on your son's, who is, apparently, a charming young man, whose future and position I should very much dislike to compromise."

What Madame Lapierre suffered was inexpressible; all her worst fears were more than realized.

A stranger, an unknown creature, whose concealed purpose, intentions and interests she was ignorant of,

possessed her secret. She and her son were at this woman's discretion.

The horror of the situation gave her strength to fight against it.

"Go on!" said she, in a firm tone, which belied the uneasiness depicted on her features.

"I ask you," replied Dolores, "where Louis Clermont is at present? for I know that he is no longer with you."

"With me!" repeated the convict's wife, completely stupefied.

"Yes, with you. He took refuge there after the murder he committed in Trois-Couronnes street. You received and concealed him there. He has left there. Once more, where is he?"

"Oh! my God! my God!" murmured the unhappy woman; "we are lost!"

But all at once she recovered herself, and, hastening toward Madame de Los Rios, who threw herself back with a gesture of fear, promptly suppressed, said:

"And if I tell you that you lie——"

"I have proofs. Well, I see that I must explain all to you. That is the simplest way of reassuring you, and of proving that you have only to answer me."

There was a moment's silence. One could hear Madame Lapierre's panting breath; her appearance would have moved the cruelest enemy; but Dolores appeared insensible to her suffering.

"You are," she at length commenced, "Louis Clermont's legal wife, and you have a son by him now twenty-five years old. I need not relate to you your husband's life. You know it as well and better than I. To proceed: three days ago I was still ignorant of the fact that Ernestine Lapierre, dressmaker, was one and the same person with Madame Louis Clermont. Only, I needed to know exactly who Ernestine Lapierre really was, and I soon learned. How? By informing myself in my own way. One always knows what one wishes to know. Why did I wish to know? Because, as I have already told you, Louis Clermont

had taken refuge with you. If I wished to recover his lost trace, it was first necessary for me to learn who you were and what ties united you to this man, who is certainly not the flower of honest men."

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN WHICH DOLORES LEARNS WHAT SHE WISHES TO KNOW.

MADAME LAPIERRE'S humiliation was complete. She felt herself in the clutches of this woman who at first had appeared so charming, and who now seemed so terrible, with her great, brilliant, deer-like eyes; her skin, gilded by a passion-stirring sun; her languishing postures, like a crouching panther's; and her contralto voice, which sent forth these cruel revelations without losing any of its diabolical sweetness, yet with the trenchant accent of a firm, irresistible will which nothing could change.

"Then," continued Dolores, keeping her eyes fixed on the other's face, and watching there the traces of anguish which told that all her blows struck home, "you are in my power. You cannot deny your real personality, and nothing is easier than to make it known. Meanwhile I am further and better armed against you."

Madame Lapierre shuddered, but remained silent.

"For," pursued the creole, "your husband having been absent from you for twenty years, you might insist that you were ignorant what had become of him, if I could not prove that you had seen him within the last eight days, and this I can publicly prove, in case you should refuse."

"No, that is impossible."

Dolores shrugged her shoulders; and, lifting the cushion on which she was reclining, she drew forth an object which she held under Madame Clermont's eyes.

"Do you see this weapon?" said she. "It is a

Spanish knife, and belongs to Louis Clermont, who let it fall in your son's room."

Gaston's mother trembled. She indeed remembered that at the moment she entered Gaston's room her husband and son were struggling for the possession of a similar weapon.

This remembrance had escaped from her memory, and even Gaston's, under the shock of the terrible emotions which the convict's return had caused them.

"I see that you recognize it!" said Dolores, replacing the *navaja* under the cushion. "But that is not all; do you recognize *this?*" And she held forth a white muslin cuff.

Madame Lapierre trembled convulsively.

"I see," said the creole, "that you also recognize this cuff, the mate of which you have at home. It fell in the garret corridor which leads to your son's workroom; you can recall to yourself under what circumstances it was lost!"

Gaston's mother regarded Dolores with a stupefied air which almost amounted to superstition. Her ideas became confused, her good sense failed her; she was utterly powerless.

"How do you know this? How have you obtained these things?" she finally murmured, questioning not with the hope or desire of an explanation; she was only thinking aloud.

"That is my business. I wish to make you thoroughly understand that I know all. Is this true?"

"It is true!"

"Then you no longer deny having seen Louis Clermont, and having given him shelter when a strange chance, which I bless, conducted him to your rooms, after the murder of *Coco*, called *The Death's Head?*"

"I deny nothing, madame."

"That is something gained. Now will you answer?"

"What?"

"My only question: Where is Clermont?"

"And if I tell you, asked the poor mother, "what will you do?"

"That is my secret; I shall render no account to you."

"You will denounce him, deliver him up to justice, and send him to the scaffold!" cried Madame Lapierre, with increasing terror and energy.

She had arisen; a fever, a desperate resolution, animated her fatigued features, throwing fresh fire into her eyes, before almost burned out with tears.

Dolores, in turn, regarded her with astonished curiosity.

"Do you still love him?" demanded the creole.

"I!" said Madame Lapierre, with a horrified gesture which left no doubt in regard to her sentiments.

She paused, meditated a moment, joined her hands together, and, falling on her knees before Madame de Los Rios, said:

"I love my son, madame!"

The tone in which she said these words was so heart-rending, and revealed such a poignant grief, that even Dolores was somewhat moved.

She made a gesture as if she wished to speak. The other left her no time.

"I love my son," repeated the mother, "and I wish to save him—save him from the infamy of the name he bears; save him from shame and despair—a shame and despair which will kill him if the horrible truth becomes known. For twenty years I have worn myself out in this struggle and have sacrificed myself to this sacred duty; I have made him honored, have conquered esteem for him, and have created a position for him, humble as yet, but which may some day become something. We have lived in poverty, and are still so living; but he wears a noble front, and blushes before no one. The gaping wound in our hearts no indiscreet or malevolent eye has yet fathomed. One word, and the scandal is known; the stain of this blood will cover the innocent. It matters little to

me! But to my son, who is young, handsome, talented, and is at the commencement of life. Ah! He already suffers so much, if you knew——"

She stopped herself.

"Hold!" she continued. "I am ready for anything—I would joyfully give my life—I would gladly endure the most terrible tortures, if, at such a price, I could redeem my son and drown with my blood and tears this hideous past, this still worse present, which threatens and is about to crush him! What must I do, madame? Speak, command, and I will obey; I do not care what it is, provided that you do not ruin him in ruining his father! Do not compel me to deliver up this monster of a man—above all because he has a son! Eight days ago I saved him for that reason, and I cannot, I cannot—deliver him to justice!"

Dolores heard Madame Lapierre with unremitting attention; her somber looks had become softened and lightened with a pale reflection of sympathy. She arose from her easy-chair, leaned over the poor woman who implored her, took her by the hands, and said, kindly:

"Arise, madame, and feel re-assured!"

A ray of hope shone in Madame Lapierre's eyes as she allowed herself to be raised to her feet.

The two women stood face to face.

"Yes, re-assure yourself!" repeated the creole. "If you had let me speak, you would have already known that nothing of the kind you fear threatens you.—You desire secrecy, that all should remain ignorant—Eh! well, I swear that your secret shall be respected, and that no one shall know it."

"Oh! God!—ought I to, can I believe you?"

"On my word alone, no—for you do not know me;—but facts shall convince you. The end I am pursuing has nothing in common with you and your interests, if you do not come between me and that end.—I have no evil intentions towards Louis Clermont; and, when I ask you to tell me where he is, it is not for the purpose of giving him up to justice. I wish to save him as much as you do, for I have need of him."

"You?"

"Yes, I—that astonishes you, but it is my secret;—each has her own. Respect mine, as I told you in the beginning, and I will respect yours."

"Oh! if you are deceiving me!"

"I am not; and the proof of it is that it was through me that Clermont escaped the pursuing police when he took refuge in your house."

"Through you?"

"Yes.—Don't you remember that he left traces of his passage and of his struggle with your son, which would have betrayed him, if the room had not been put in order and these traces effaced? This weapon, which denounced him; this cuff, which revealed your complicity; all this disappeared—yes, madame, and it was through me, through my care."

"You were there, then?"

"No. Do not question me. It would be useless. But this partly explains a fact that must have been inexplicable and disquieting to you ——"

"Oh! yes, greatly so."

"Then, if I helped you to conceal Louis Clermont, it was because I did not want him captured. And if I did not want that, it was because I had an interest which should assure you of my discretion."

Dolores spoke with an earnestness which did not allow her sincerity to be doubted. Besides, her acts spoke for her, and Madame Lapierre was in her power.

She could no longer hesitate.

"What do you wish to know?" she said, in a subdued voice, still trembling from the results of her scarcely softened anguish.

"Where is Clermont?"

"He is called Bernard, and is living in Avenue Neuilly."

"By himself?"

"No! with the Duke of Kandos."

Dolores uttered a triumphant cry.

"With the duke!—at last!"

Her eyes shone with a brilliancy which frightened

Madame Lapierre afresh, while the ordinarily pale face of the creole became purple from the blood which rushed into it.

"You know him?" cried Gaston's mother, apprehending some new misfortune.

"No!" bruskly replied Dolores. "Now, let us separate. We shall never see each other again."

She pushed her interlocutor towards the door. All at once she stopped.

"Ah! a last word:—I will keep silent, if you do the same! Do not speak to your son; so that no one, neither he, Clermont, nor the duke, may expect our meeting or know of my existence—otherwise ——"

She ground her teeth, and her face became terrible.

"Otherwise, woe be to you!—I will be pitiless!—you have heard me, do you understand?"

"Yes, madame,—but ——"

"No buts!—obey, or I crush you—and your son—One imprudent word, one only, and ——"

She had no need to finish her thought: she declared it in her gestures and looks. She wore such an expression of ferocious resolution on her convulsed features that Madame Lapierre becoming terrified, said to her:

"Madame, I swear it to you—but I have your promise ——"

"Keep your oath. *I keep all mine!*" And Dolores pushed her violently out of the room.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN WHICH GASTON KEEPS HIS PROMISE.

AS a result of this interview, and of the emotions beyond her strength, if not her courage, which she had experienced during her explanation with Dolores, Madame Lapierre, on finding herself once more with her son, was unable to conquer the weakness we have before spoken of, and fainted.

Her nerves were shattered. Heroism has its limits: there always comes a moment when it is powerless, no matter how willing.

With her son interrogating her; she, so cruelly smitten since his birth, so frightfully threatened for the past eight days, under the influence of the idea that their secret was no longer their own, but henceforth belonged to another strange person, against whom she was powerless, who would act according to her own interests or momentary passions, a vertigo seized her and suddenly cast her to the floor.

This was, perhaps, a blessing.

When Madame Lapierre recovered consciousness, thanks to Gaston's care, her weakness protected her against the young man's clear and pressing questions.

"What is the matter? What has happened to you?" said he, in a broken voice, but too troubled and frightened himself to closely analyze his mother's answers, or to insist on serious ones.

"Nothing, my child—nothing, I assure you . . . calm yourself and don't get frightened. I went out before dining. It is exhausting—that is all."

"Oh! you work too hard—overdrive yourself!" cried he, accepting this explanation as the true one.

"That is also my fault. I ought to earn enough for us both. At my age this is shameful!"

"No—no! I gladly work. I need it. . . . A musician's career is one of the most laborious and ill-requited at the outset," said she, kindly, happy at seeing the turn her son's thoughts had taken, and above all that she would not have to struggle against questions that she feared, being unable to answer them.

"Because I have tried to acquire the art, like an ambitious fool," he bitterly continued. "I wished to conquer glory. . . . But now that my ambition has no longer any aim or reason for existence ——"

He thought of Annette—of Annette lost to him——

"Now, I will take up a trade, and your welfare shall be my sole thought and my only joy."

They exchanged a few words more; but Madame Lapierre needed repose, and even pretended she needed it more that she actually did, in order to be left by herself, so she could try and see clearly amid the confusion of her thoughts and fears.

Gaston hesitated about retiring.

"I beg you to go," she said. "I feel sleepy. . . . Go to your own bed, and to-morrow you will find me as well as ever, I promise you."

At length Gaston went to his room; but he did not close his eyes, nor did he even undress. He only took off his shoes, so as to make no noise when he came, every quarter of an hour, on the tips of his toes, to partly open his mother's door, which he had left unfastened, in order to assure himself that the poor woman was not getting any worse and did not need his care.

She slept no more than he; her ears wide open, she heard him come, and feigned sleep, in order to reassure him, with the hope that he would finally take some repose.

At daybreak he re-entered his mother's room, approached her bed, and contemplated for a moment that face, whitened by every suffering and privation.

This time Madame Lapierre really slept. Physical fatigue had ended by overcoming mental anxiety.

Gaston listened for an instant to her feeble but regular breathing; then, with tears in his eyes, he stooped toward her, and, rapidly kissing the gray hair of the martyr, murmured:

"Give me the courage to do my duty—my whole duty!"

Then, feeling slightly reassured and comforted, he went to his own room and threw himself, for a few minutes, on his hitherto untouched bed.

It was eight o'clock, when he suddenly awoke with a start; the work-women were at their tasks, as usual under the supervision of his mother, who was still a trifle pale, but strong and resolute.

He rearranged his disordered dress, bathed his head in cold water, and got ready to go out.

"Where are you going?" asked his mother.

"I am going to take a little air," he quickly replied, as he left.

He was going to the Avenue Neuilly.

At eleven o'clock he rang at the garden gate. A servant came and opened it. Gaston knew the way, and they were accustomed to see him come every day, at the same hour, to give a music lesson to the duke's daughter. The servant therefore left him to find his own way to the house, where he entered a little drawing-room, on the ground floor, which served as a study for the young girl.

After having knocked discreetly, without receiving any answer, he opened the door.

He saw Annette seated before her silent piano. On a music-stand was a sheet of music, the piece they had last studied together. The keys did not resound under the swift fingers of the pupil. Annette sat there, her arms hanging down beside her body, the picture of absolute despair.

On hearing Gaston's footsteps Annette quickly turned around.

She paused, then arose, and each extended a hand.

That of the young girl was hot; the young man's was like ice.

"Thank you, for having come!" she said.

"I had promised, Annette!" he feebly responded.

The paleness of his face and the deep circles around his eyes told through what anguish he had passed. Still he appeared firm and resolved—with the sad firmness and desperate resolution of one who is about to commit suicide.

Annette had looked at him with a rapid glance, full of doubt and mute interrogation, in which she nevertheless found for herself vague and foolish hopes.

Perhaps, since yesterday, he had changed his mind, had found some way of surmounting the obstacle of which he had spoken, or had decided to pass it by and ignore it.

Does not one always hope at eighteen, and, above all, is not Love the god of persistent and unreasoning Hope?

This illusion did not last long.

The young man's face spoke only too plainly.

She made a gesture of disappointment, grief, and resignation, all in one; and, answering aloud what she saw or divined, she repeated, with a smile which almost broke Gaston's heart:

"Thanks, nevertheless!"

She was too proud to insist, to go back to what had been said, or to try again to change this will, which struck her to the heart, but struck her standing upright.

There was a short silence.

"You wish to see the duke?" continued she, finally, in a calm and almost cold voice.

"Yes; do you believe that he will see me?"

"Certainly; he shall be told that you are here."

She left Gaston's side in order to pull the bell rope, but at the same instant the door opened and the duchess entered.

"Ah! Monsieur Lapierre!" said she, on perceiving the young man.

Gaston bowed respectfully.

She gave him her hand with a charming grace, and added, in her soft, sweet voice:

"I am happy to see you, Monsieur Lapierre. We were all uneasy at your long absence."

Frank and sincere as was Jeanne, she would not have been a woman if she had not known how, at the right moment, to conceal her impressions and after-thoughts.

So nothing in her look, voice, or gestures showed that she had the least suspicion of what had passed, yesterday, between the two lovers, nor that she had observed, on entering, the air of bitter sadness imprinted on their features.

"Madame," replied Gaston, slightly blushing, "for some days my mother has been indisposed, ill——"

"Oh! if I had known it, we would have gone to see her——"

"And, even yesterday evening, on returning from some trifling business, she was overcome with weakness, which much alarmed me. She fell, unconscious, before me."

On hearing these words Annette quickly raised her eyes to see if he was speaking the truth, or if he was exaggerating in order to better excuse himself and render his story more probable.

Gaston caught her glance of mute interrogation.

"It is the truth, madamoiselle," he hastened to add; "and I have passed a sleepless night watching over her."

"But she is now better, doubtless?" cried both the women.

"Yes, better, much better. She went back to her work, this morning——"

"What imprudence! She ought not to be left alone," interrupted Annette, with an outburst of warm sympathy which greatly touched the young man.

"I am going back to her in a few moments," replied Gaston, with an embarrassed air.

"But not before having seen the duke, who expects you," replied Jeanne. "He has been already told of your arrival."

"I am at his orders," said Lapierre, in a trembling voice.

"I will conduct you to him," said the little duchess, and she went toward the door, followed by Gaston, who did not feel strong enough to throw a parting glance at Annette.

They departed without the latter making a gesture or saying a word.

As we have said, this scene occurred on the ground floor. The duke's study was on the one above.

On arriving at the landing, the duchess and her *protege*, who had both preserved silence, found themselves face to face with M. Bernard, the steward, who was leaving the duke's study, and masked, so to say, the entrance.

Was this simple chance?

It was not probable; for, on seeing Gaston, in place of continuing on his way, as he had usually done when he formerly met him in the mansion, he stopped resolutely, and looked at the other as he advanced.

On recognizing Clermont Gaston became livid, and his eyes became full of an expression of deep anger.

"Madame la duchesee," murmured he, in a trembling voice which surprised the duchess, "I thank you for having kindly accompanied me thus far, but I desire to be alone at present. I have a few words to say to this—to M. Bernard, the steward.

"Willingly, sir," responded the duchess. "Besides, you are here, and I had no intention of assisting at your interview with the duke."

She hastily bowed and descended the stairs; not, however, without having cast on Gaston a glance, the troubled air of which quickly struck him, and also one at the steward, who remained impassive, with a half smile on his lips.

When the young wife had disappeared, Gaston turned towards Louis Clermont, with such a resolute, yet distracted countenance that the latter, without

leaving him to speak, cried out, although trying to restrain his voice:

"No nonsense, young man! If you are wise Annette is yours."

Gaston instantly stopped him.

"I forbid you to utter her name," answered he, in an accent of genuine horror.

So, this man, his father, whom he knew to be the worst of wretches, and who was the only obstacle to his love and happiness, knew of his love, dared to speak of it and to make of it a sort of stepping stone.

The convict shrugged his shoulders with an air of cynical pity.

"You haven't common sense," he replied, "and you are going to drown yourself like a beast, when I am ready to offer you a foothold. What do I ask of you? Simply to hold your tongue and become a made man."

"That is to say, to become infamous and cowardly, to become your accomplice! Never! I am determined to do my duty. I came for that purpose! I have hesitated too long."

"Go ahead!" said Louis Clermont, making a gesture of bravado. "What I wished to do was simply on your account—you are powerless against me."

"I can have you driven from this house."

The steward shrugged his shoulders.

"You cannot remain here. I do not wish it—knowing who you are—being what I am. I will no longer suffer it. Will you leave of your own accord?"

"I have already answered you."

"Yes, but I hesitated—to-day I no longer hesitate. Will you leave—once more I ask you?"

"No."

"And if I told the duke the truth?"

"You will not tell it."

"Yes, I will."

"Eh! well, so be it! So much the worse for you!" replied Clermont, with a threatening laugh and a look which made the young man shudder.

Then, standing aside, he left the passage free to his son.

The latter hesitated a moment. He was afraid, both of this man and himself. It was his father after all, and there are terrible responsibilities belonging to kinship from which nothing can unloose one.

"Sir," he replied, in an almost supplicating voice, "do you not think that you have done us enough evil, that my mother is sufficiently unhappy and that I am stricken hard enough? If there remains anything human in you, do not compel me to dishonor myself in the eyes of this man," he pointed towards the duke's chamber, "to make you known to him. I have renounced happiness—I have no right to it, thanks to you. Isn't that sufficient for you? I beg of you to abandon this house of your own accord, this house in which live all that I love, and for whom I would give my life, after my mother. Go. You know only too well that your secret will be carefully guarded by me.

Louis Clermont regarded him and listened to him with a troubled air. His glance was dull; he appeared ill at ease, and a prey to opposing sentiments, whose terrible struggle was to be easily read upon his features, agitated by nervous twitchings. All at once he raised his head, and resuming his expression of frightful irony, he cried in a hoarse voice:

"That is impossible! I offered you peace, you will not have it. Act as you please, but—you are forewarned—beware of the future!"

And he rapidly made his escape.

CHAPTER XX.

THE PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE.

ON seeing him disappear, Gaston almost wished to recall him, or to run after him.

His father's last words, his sudden departure, depriving him of all hope, left him face to face with a frightful duty which he was not sure he had the courage to carry out.

This man had said to him:

"I offer you peace. Annette is yours, if you wish."

Was this a lie, a snare?

Was it the truth?

Had he, in reality, the means of assuring his son's happiness? But how?

"Oh! I am a coward!" Gaston suddenly said to himself, ashamed of this hesitation, this touch of egotism, which weakened his honesty. "No! no!"

And, rushing resolutely forward, he knocked at the duke's door. There was no answer. He opened it and found himself in the presence of the duke.

The latter was promenading up and down his study, his head lowered, and his hands clasped behind his back.

His expression greatly struck the young man.

It was sad and despairing. His features revealed great fatigue. On perceiving the visitor, the duke gave a start, and his eyes cast an angry glance at Gaston; but he soon recovered himself, composed his features, and approached him with a smile on his lips and his hand extended, saying:

"How, is it you, Monsieur Lapierre? Excuse me, I was so preoccupied that I at first did not recognize

you, although I had been informed of your arrival."

"It is for me to excuse myself, *Monsieur le duc*, for having entered in this abrupt manner. I knocked, still——"

"And I did not hear you?" That often happens. I am subject to great distractions. Whatever is the cause, you are welcome."

He pointed to a chair, and seated himself before his working-desk.

"Monsieur le duc," commenced Gaston, "I received the letter you did me the honor to address to me, asking me to call upon you, and I would have hastened to comply with your request sooner, if circumstances——"

"All right, my friend," interrupted the duke, with a certain precipitation of manner. Although he endeavored to appear perfectly natural, he was visibly agitated and uneasy, and his glance wavered. But Gaston was in no state to remark this.

"You are here," pursued the duke, "that is well. I have, indeed, something serious to say to you. Oh! re-assure yourself. I hope that it will not be disagreeable to you, but the contrary!"

Gaston suffered horribly.

This warm, amicable reception wrung his heart and showed him the happiness lying before him. It was the punishment of Tantalus.

There was a short pause.

The Duke of Kandos was collecting his thoughts before commencing. The young man in vain sought to collect his own, so as to enter, without imprudence, upon the subject upon which he wished to speak with the duke, and thus prevent the duke from commencing another order of ideas, and put an end promptly to the punishment he himself was enduring.

His interlocutor gave him no time for this. One would have said that he, too, was in haste to bring things to an end.

"My dear friend," he all at once continued, "I think

that you have always found here, from all of us, a kindly and sympathetic welcome ——"

"Oh! Monsieur le duc, much superior to that which I could have expected or hoped for; a music teacher, a young man in my position, without fortune or future ——"

"You are too modest, Monsieur Lapierre. You possess real talent, and I do not doubt the brilliancy of your future. But you have other qualities besides. I am informed—I know that you are the best of sons to your mother, who, also, is one of the most honest and estimable of women. Your character is serious. . . . To sum up in one word, I would be happy and proud to have such a son as yourself."

"Monsieur!" murmured Gaston.

"I know nothing finer, nor more worthy of encouragement, than a poor man who struggles, by honest methods, to conquer a place in society," added the duke, with a certain emotion in his voice, while a slight blush mounted to his cheeks; "who resists all the temptations of misery; who works unceasingly; who subdues all his desires and conquers all the passions and fervency of youth, or rather, only makes a good use of them. That is fine—very fine—meritorious and rare. Oh! yes ——"

"Monsieur le duc," interrupted Gaston, with a sad cry, "I do not merit all these eulogies."

The duke smiled.

"Permit me not to believe you. You have but one fault—an excessive pride. I like this defect. I understand it—and that is the reason why I have begged you to come and see me. You love Mademoiselle de Kandos?"

As much as he had been expecting something like this, Gaston remained, at first, mute before the frankness and suddenness of this attack.

"Is it not true?" pursued M. de Kandos, after having awaited, for an instant, an answer which did not come.

"It is true," murmured the young man. "Also, I have come here to-day for the last time."

"Why is that?"

"Because I know that this love is impossible," replied Gaston, with some firmness, "and because I do not wish to become more culpable than I am already."

"This response does you honor, my dear friend," said the duke. "But you forget that Mademoiselle de Kandos also loves you."

"Oh! do not overwhelm me," murmured the unhappy young man.

"You can easily understand," added the duke, "that this love could not escape my knowledge, nor the duchess', who so tenderly loves her step-daughter. Now, if knowing it, I have continued to receive you, it has been because I did not blame it!"

"Monsieur —— it is impossible!" almost mechanically repeated Louis Clermont's son.

"I understand your scruples. You are poor and bear a plebeian name. I am rich, and bear an aristocratic title. You have considered these to be insurmountable obstacles."

"*I know it,* Monsieur le duc; I swear to you that I know it."

"Knowing it, you should not, perhaps, have abandoned yourself to this love, which has been born in your and in my daughter's heart."

"Yes—yes—I should have done so. I am ready to withdraw. I am resolved upon it."

"It is too late, my young friend; and I know too well, on my own part, what are the temptations of youth and the heart—"

He gave a sigh and bent his head.

—"Not to pardon your enthusiasm," he concluded, in a weak voice.

But he quickly recovered himself.

"You dared not ask me for the hand of Mademoiselle de Kandos, fearing not only refusal but also severe censure. Undeceive yourself! I have but one desire—to make my daughter happy. Happiness for her consists in bearing your name. You are poor, it is true, and she is rich—less so than is believed, however," he hastened to add, with a gloomy air. "I

married a poor girl, an orphan, and in this union I have found joys I would scarcely have dared to dream of."

He stopped. He was violently moved; but he controlled his emotion, and continued:

"So, I have no right to impose on others a respect for considerations of fortune which had no effect upon myself, and of which I have been able to appreciate the nothingness. You have talent and a fine future, which your marriage would render easier and bring nearer to you. You are an honest man, I know. You love my daughter—she loves you. The duchess, whose wishes are orders to me, approves of the union. Do you wish to be my son?"

The duke had risen, regarding with surprise Gaston's discomposed countenance, which ought to have expressed the wildest joy and the liveliest gratitude, and which only expressed a frightful despair.

"You do not answer?" said the duke.

"Monsieur le duc, I cannot. It is impossible."

The duke gave a start, and all at once a somber flame lighted up his eyes.

"What is it that you cannot do? What is impossible?" he demanded, in an altered voice, whose accent revealed surprise mixed with uneasiness.

"Monsieur," replied Gaston, concealing his face in his hands, "I cannot be the husband of Mademoiselle de Kandos."

At first the duke recoiled a few paces; then, returning toward the young man, he seized his fingers, withdrew them from his face, and forced him to hold up his head, with an unexpected violence.

"Why not?" he muttered.

And his eyes, filled with a threatening and terrible brilliancy, gazed into Gaston's, as if reading the deepest recesses of his soul.

CHAPTER XXI.

QUID PRO QUO.

"OH! don't ask me! Don't insist, Monsieur le duc," responded Gaston. "I cannot; I would not have the courage to reply to you."

"Why? why?" repeated the duke through his teeth, and his face discomposed.

But Gaston paid no attention. He was too unhappy, too troubled, himself, to notice the duke's state. He saw in him only anger, which seemed natural after the offer he had made and the refusal he had received.

"I am in despair," he continued. "I feel how culpable I am—how odious, unpardonable my conduct has been. Yes, you are right: I should have left this house on the day when I first felt a love which was prohibited to me. I have been weak, cowardly, and criminal, whatever you may please to call it, and no one will ever judge me so severely as I shall judge myself. But I suffer so much, I so cruelly expiate my fault, that I merit some pity, don't you think so, Monsieur le duc? You offer me happiness—life, and I am obliged to refuse. Do not accuse either my heart or my character; believe me neither ungrateful nor unfaithful to a sentiment which I no longer dare to name. Honor forbids my accepting," added he in a lower voice, while lowering his head and eyes to escape the glance which questioned him.

"*Honor!*" repeated the duke, in a smothered voice, and recoiling some paces. "Ah! honor prevents your accepting an alliance—with me?"

"I cannot give my name to Mademoiselle de

Kandos," continued Gaston. "And, besides, you, yourself, would not consent to it, if I told you——"

"What?"

"What I beg you not to force me to tell."

The duke had become livid.

He leaned unsteadily against his desk, and seemed thunder-struck.

All wrath had disappeared from his face; his glance was dim.

A strange expression, a mixture of unspeakable terror and anguish, convulsed his features. He seemed to have grown twenty years older in a few seconds; his eyes, now, looked away from Gaston's, which were raised to him supplicatingly.

Even amidst his own grief the young man's surprise at this sight was profound.

This was not what he had expected or anticipated.

This father, whose daughter had been refused, ought to have experienced and manifested an entirely different order of ideas.

Still, the vague suspicion which had crossed Gaston's mind did not last, and gave place to a very opposite sentiment.

He only saw, in the duke's emotion, the grief which his own conduct, apparently so unworthy, had inspired in a man who had lowered himself to him in spite of all the prejudices of society; who had given him his hand as to a son; who had proposed to him an unhoped for union, and who had retired, wounded to the heart, before a refusal which nothing could have led him to anticipate.

This was an excruciating feeling for Gaston; he told himself that the most frightful death would be sweet in comparison with the anguish which he experienced.

"Oh! pardon me!" said he, in tearful tones. "You have been so good to me. But you ought to understand that there must be insurmountable motives; I love Madamoiselle de Kandos with all my soul, and, if I act thus; if I impose this grief upon myself; if I

play this *rôle*, which is revolting to me and tortures me——"

"Very well, monsieur," slowly interrupted the duke, and seeming to recover some of his coolness. "It is useless to insist, for to-day; but believe me, I must have clearer explanations. I cannot accept this situation—I do not accept it—no, never!" said he, forcibly; and his nervous fingers tore the cloth covering the table on which he leaned. "We will see each other again, monsieur, before long. I shall have to speak to you; and you will have to tell me what you pretend to hold secret."

Gaston made a gesture, which the duke took for a negative response, but which was only one of despair and supplication.

"Yes—yes," continued Annette's father, with a rude violence, which suddenly brought him out of his torpid state; "you shall speak—I swear it to you. One has no right to proceed as you have done, by vague affirmations, incomprehensible allusions, and which I repel. You owe me explanations—I will have them!"

He had approached the young man with flashing eyes and threatening voice. A slight froth appeared at the corners of his lips.

"At present I could not listen to them, or reply to them—I so little expected what has happened. I have need of all my coolness. We will see each other again."

He stopped, drew out his handkerchief, and wiped the sweat off his forehead.

"But meanwhile, monsieur, I think I do not ask too much in counting on absolute discretion on your part, in regard to the subject we have touched upon."

"Gaston believed that he wished him not to reveal the proposition he had received, and the refusal of it, for the sake of the reputation and consideration of the young girl.

"Oh! monsieur," he replied, "no one shall ever know—I swear it to you—that you have offered me the hand of Mademoiselle de Kandos, and that to this young lady, worthy of all respect and admiration, I

have given what the world would call the affront of a refusal. As to the explanation which you wish, however cruel it may be, I understand that you have the right to demand it, and that it is my duty to give it. On every account I should have desired to escape it. That was a foolish hope; I will empty the chalice to the dregs, since it will be necessary. That will be my expiation. I am at your orders."

"That suffices, monsieur. I will notify you, and I count upon your word."

With an abrupt gesture he pointed toward the door, and Gaston departed, his head on fire, his heart broken, almost mad, incapable of reasoning and even of thinking; only feeling an immense grief; having entirely forgotten to speak of Bernard, the steward, the principal cause nevertheless, of his presence in this house, which he now abandoned without hope of return, after what had just passed between himself and Annette's father.

When he was alone, the duke raised his clenched fists in the air, with a sort of desperate rage.

"What does he know?" said this man, whose fortune and name were the envy of so many, who would have only pitied him if they could have just then seen him.

"What does he know? And from whom? And how does he know it? Ah! *honor* prevents his marrying Annette. That is very plain. What a horrible existence is mine! I was afraid my head was turned; fortunately he has held his tongue: but this cannot last thus. It is necessary to take steps against this new threat, to know exactly what to do, to advise, and not to leave him to himself. I—if it only concerned me, it would soon be over!" he added in a tone of somber resolution. "But Jeanne—Annette—I owe them happiness, my life has no other aim. They shall have it, at any price. Ah! shall I never be forgiven? never!"

He fell on a seat, but soon arose and rang violently.

A domestic appeared.

"Tell M. Bernard that I wish to speak with him."

The servant bowed and went out.

Two minutes later the steward Bernard entered.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE ACCOMPLICES.

THE steward regarded the duke with his habitual half-smile; but the other's face was so haggard, expressed such great suffering, and had at the same time something so threatening and frightful about it that Bernard, or rather Louis Clermont, trembled.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"See if anyone can overhear us."

Clermont opened the door, glanced over the landing, then returning, said:

"We are entirely alone."

"Monsieur Lapierre has just left here——"

"Yes, yes, I know. And, upon my word, he is as much upset as yourself; he has gone off like an arrow and quitted the mansion like a man who had the devil at his heels, without even seeing Mademoiselle de Kandos, who was on the watch for him at the window of the small drawing-room below, and who herself has just fainted in the duchess' arms."

"Do you know what he came to say to me?"

"Hum. I have a slight suspicion," grumbled the steward.

"He has refused Annette's hand, which *I* offered him!"

"And he said nothing to you about me?"

"About *you?*—No!—What have you to do with it?"

"We shall see, presently. What reason did he give you?"

"That honor forbade him giving his name to the young girl."

Clermont shrugged his shoulders.

"Eh well, what of it? So much the worse for him.

What is there in that to upset you? Zounds! Go and show your face to people, and it will not take them long to guess the truth. But you are not the man who is needed. Ah! if *I* was in your place——"

"But, wretch!" cried the duke, grinding his teeth, "don't you understand this thing, and does your cynicism render you blind and incapable of seeing the danger?"

"What danger?"

"Why, he knows all, or, at least, he knows enough to make him refuse to marry mademoiselle and to associate his name with mine."

"All what?" replied the astonished convict.

Then, suddenly striking his forehead, he commenced to laugh silently, and let himself fall on a sofa.

The duke gazed at him as if stupefied.

"I believe he has become mad!" he murmured.

"No, no! It is you who are *non compos*," replied the steward. "What a fool!"

The duke made a furious gesture.

"Cease this familiarity," said he; "explain yourself."

"Nothing more simple.—The young man is my son!"

"*Your son!*"

"Eh! yes! My son, recovered by me eight days ago, when I was returning from closing Coco's mouth forever, in order to save us."

The duke shuddered.

"In making my escape by way of the roofs I fell into the bosom of my family. There is the whole mystery."

"So, Monsieur Lapierre, this young man——"

"Is Gaston Clermont, legitimate son of Louis Clermont, here present, and of Ernestine Lapierre, his wife, at present a dress-maker in Trois-Couronnes street."

"Ah! the poor wretch!—the poor wretch!" cried the duke, wildly.

"Well, one does not choose his father, it is true;

and I believe that he was not overglad to find me again. Just like my wife!"

"Oh! I now understand why he refuses. So it is not because ——"

"No, Monsieur le duc," interrupted the ex-convict. "It is all simply because he considers himself unworthy of allying himself with the last representative of the noble Kandos family. It is very fine, isn't it?"

"You drive me mad!" said the duke, with anger and disgust.

"I know it! But one cannot separate from the steward, Bernard, without his consent, and the position is too good for the aforesaid Bernard to quit it voluntarily."

"Yes, the position has nothing but charms for you, who have neither conscience nor remorse; who only wish for gold to gratify your passions, and who dip into my purse—which is more yours than mine."

"Well," said the rogue, with a tranquil air, "one only has here below the good one gives himself—or takes—which is the same thing."

"But did this unhappy young man know his father's name when he first came here and fell in love with Annette?"

"Doubtless—only he believed that father dead, lost, or eaten by sharks or crocodiles."

"I now understand his hesitation, then his final resolution; his despair and his reticence, which I took for an allusion—I barely escaped denouncing myself. He is an honest man!"

"He is an idiot! Before he came in here I proposed peace to him, offering to help him marry his beloved, if he wished to, and he repulsed my offers."

"What could you have done?"

"Everything! I could have forged all the false papers he could have desired, or a certificate in good and due form, of the death of a certain Louis Clermont. I am not vain in regard to myself, and care nothing about my personality. I only ask to eclipse myself—to bury myself under the skin of the humble

steward, Bernard. One could not be less troublesome."

"Why did you not tell me this? Why did you not forewarn me? I would have avoided a painful scene, to him and to me, which almost lost us both. For a moment, good sense, reason and courage deserted me; I uttered words which were grave, if his own trouble, which I now understand, had not kept him from heeding them."

"Why?—why? Because you are sensitive; and I was always afraid you would do something foolish. I also thought that the young man would let himself be managed. To refuse a pretty girl, with a great name and money! Could *my* son do such a thing? Not a bit of it! There is none of my blood in his veins! He has taken altogether after his mother, that is plain. But, nevertheless, in his own way he is a rough fellow!"

"And you did not recognize him, while seeing him here every day?"

"He resembles me so little! And besides, my bump of relationship is not largely developed—and the voice of blood told me nothing. Besides, the name Lapierre is very common, and, to speak the truth, I had for a long time believed both mother and son dead from misery.

"Then, also, I feared upsetting you by telling you that two persons knew me; and whoever knows me, is not far from knowing you, duke as you are! Only I was sure of their discretion! As for the rest, since the last *affair* you have been sulky towards me, and treat me like a dog——"

"Ah! be silent! be silent, wretch! This assassination——"

He stopped, suddenly, and pressed his hands to his forehead in a fit of powerless rage.

"In the first place, I only acted in self-defense; he fired first. But you are an ingrate! Should he have been allowed to speak? If you have a taste for the guillotine, good evening. I can break off our relations!"

"Ah!"

"Yes, you will not hinder me, I know. But I am a good fellow, and not easily offended. I remain. I need you, as you need me; I cannot deprive you of your title nor your fortune, but, without me, what would you be? Lost a hundred times, a thousand times lost! I am your savior: I save you and you revile me. Fortunately I love you, such as you are; my true son, in reality, is yourself. 'One becomes attached through benefits conferred,' said a great philosopher, and you are made up of benefits conferred by me!"

"Ah! that I had died the day I first saw you!" murmured the duke.

He walked up and down in a state of great agitation, casting, from time to time, a glance full of restrained hatred and powerless fury upon the wretch who galled and braved him with the audacity of a man sure of impunity, and of his own authority.

Louis Clermont, who could assume, when he wished, the air of a well-bred and correctly proper man, if not a sympathetic one, could also, at will, and with a kind of ostentation, assume the ways and language of the lowest blackguard; he seemed to enjoy the rage the latter caused the Duke of Kandos. Did he thus revenge himself for the unconcealed horror which his companion had for him.

"Enough!" said the duke, violently. "It was still necessary that you should have brought me this new suffering, that you should erect this new obstacle in my path. You well know that I want Annette to be happy; I owe it to her! She loves this young man; she hates me instinctively."

He paused, and then continued in a lower voice:

"I often even ask myself if she has no suspicions. Finally, whoever it might be, in marrying her, I would give her a family of her own choosing; I would remove her from the house, where her presence is a torture to me. Receiving her happiness from me, she would, perhaps, have accorded me a small place in her affections; that would have comforted me. Now, all my projects are broken up. She will be in despair, and

will accuse me of this rupture—for I cannot tell her who you are, *can* I?"

"Not without also telling her something about yourself, evidently."

"So it ends; she will seek an explanation to this rupture. She will find it, the true one, and then there will be nothing left but to kill myself, thus killing Jeanne—Jeanne—poor child!"

Tears obscured his eyes.

"Kill yourself! Zounds! You are not such an *ass!*" cried the convict. "What would become of me? Let us see; calm yourself, monsieur le duc! Everything will come out all right; the young man is too much in love to remain inflexible. He shall be coaxed, and made to hear reason; I have more than one way to succeed, and our families will be united before the mayor: that will be droll and re-assuring. There can never be too many ties between us."

"What! *I* let this young girl marry the son of such a wretch as you, an assassin for whom the guillotine waits?"

"Eh! well, say then, monsieur le duc, what was it you did to *him*——"

He was unable to finish.

The duke had thrown himself upon him, frightful, his eyes ablaze, and his hands thrown forward, ready to seize the other's neck.

"One more word," he yelled, "and you are a dead man!"

Louis Clermont, turning pale, recoiled.

"Well, well! I will remain silent!" said he, like a man who feels that the cord has been stretched too far, and is in danger of breaking. "You are devilishly nervous, to-day; happily, I am stronger-headed. I will yet get you out of this trouble, and you can remain ungrateful afterward, if you wish; but you will see that Clermont possesses some good qualities, and that, without him—well, let it go. I understand myself."

With this he opened the door and quickly made his escape.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A TERRIBLE BLOW.

THIS was a somber and sinister day in the Kandos mansion.

Every one in it was uneasy or in despair, according to each one's own fashion, from different causes.

Louis Clermont had never seen the duke a prey to a more violent crisis, although for a long time their relations had been stormy.

He did not understand this change, which made him afraid. Many times already had Monsieur de Kandos been guilty of transports of passion, or of fits of despair of a nature to compromise their mutual security, for it is now very evident that terrible and criminal ties, a close and implacable complicity, united these two men of such different natures.

"This is becoming insupportable!" grumbled the old convict, transformed to the steward, while he was regaining the pavilion in which was his own particular apartment. "Here is a man violent and feeble at one and the same time. So long as the struggle lasted, he got along well enough. Now, that he has nothing to do but to enjoy himself, he loses his head; he feels remorse, the simpleton! Well! since I must count upon his help, I will manage to pacify him. It is Annette's affair which, for the moment, he has so much at heart. I will arrange it. The young man is too deeply in love to stand off long. When one is hungry and has a roast placed before him, he does not quarrel with his stomach very long. He will listen to me and will yield; I will use my small talents, and we will still be able to turn aside this danger. Now that Vigot is dead, there are no more dangers to foresee, nor risks

to run, if the duke does not become crazy; and, by Jove! there are times when I am afraid of that."

Louis Clermont shut himself up in his chamber, and went out no more that day, thinking over some plan of his own to arrange *the affair of Mademoiselle de Kandos,* as he called it; that is, to bring about the marriage of Annette and Gaston, without the latter being obliged to publicly make known the personality of his father. He did not doubt that in the end he could overcome the young fellow's scruples of honesty; and that, in any case, his passion would overcome him sooner or later.

Annette was also alone in her own room. After the first moment of weakness, reported by Louis Clermont to the duke, when, seeing Gaston fly from the house, his features all upset, without seeking to speak with her, she had understood that everything was positively broken off on his part.

She wished to let no one see either her grief, or, perhaps, the traces of the strange ideas which crossed her brain and haunted it like a frightful nightmare.

As to Jeanne, she had been unable to go to her husband's room, as he desired to remain alone, and had sent her a message to the effect that on no account must he be disturbed. The young wife's heart felt heavy at seeing all those she loved in a state of suffering; she also felt uneasy at M. Lapierre's conduct; understanding that *there* was some mystery she could not make out, and which began to make her reflect on certain things which frightened her.

Besides, the dream she had enjoyed of seeing Annette receive happiness at her father's hands had vanished; that alone would have been sufficient to grieve this delicate and generous heart, which only lived in others' joys.

The duke had, in fact, given the absolute order that no one should enter his room, not even his wife. This was the first time he had ever acted thus; it was because a new event had happened some minutes after the departure of Clermont.

The duke's valet, after having knocked several times at his master's door, had entered with a letter which he had been told was of the greatest importance.

"Who brought this letter?" demanded the duke, before opening it, and after having observed that the writing was in an unknown hand.

"A young woman," replied the servant.

"Is she waiting for an answer?"

"No, monsieur le duc; she simply said that it must be placed in the proper hands as soon as possible. I proposed to her to bring it herself; she refused, and left precipitately."

"Did you know her?"

"Not at all, monseigneur; it was the first time I ever saw her, and, besides, I had a poor view of her, for a very heavy veil covered her face."

"Very well."

"I would only wish to observe to monseigneur, if monseigneur permits——"

"Speak!"

"That this person must be a foreigner."

"What makes you think so?"

"Her accent."

"What was it like?"

"I am unable to say. It is an accent that I am unacquainted with; but, certainly, it was neither English nor German, for she had, as well as I could judge through the veil, extraordinary black hair and eyes."

"Very good; you may retire."

The servant bowed and went out.

The duke turned the letter over and over with a certain hesitation.

There are troubled and fearsome lives, in which all that is not easily and quickly explained inspires uneasiness, and everything unknown seems threatening.

At length the duke broke the black seal, without initial or coat of arms, opened the letter and read the following:

"If *Monsieur le Duc de Kandos* has not forgotten the events which occurred at *Buenos Ayres* from the 20th to the 22d of April, 1867, and if he wishes that those events should not be made public, from to-morrow, and brought to the knowledge of Justice, he will be ready to receive the person who will present herself at his mansion to-night, at midnight.

"This person, who will not be alone, moreover, and for whom, consequently, he will be wrong in trying to set a snare, must be introduced to his presence in the most discreet fashion.

"He will readily understand that this is for his own interest.

"Exactly at midnight he will hear, twice repeated, the cry of the screech-owl.

"Let him open the back gate of his garden, and conduct to his study, far from every eye and ear, the person who will present herself.

"*Monsieur le Duc de Kandos* will burn this letter, and obey its instructions.

"*He must do this.*"

This strange missive bore neither date nor signature, and the writing, as we have said, was entirely unknown to the duke.

Was it a man's or a woman's?—Impossible to tell.

The duke had become pallid on reading these lines. His whole body trembled.

He re-read it three times.

"Well!" said he, finally, with a smile it was painful to see. "All is finished! Here is the final blow. The whole past returns; that past which I believed dead and forever buried!

"So there still remain witnesses of those cursed days!" murmured he, in a lower tone. "Who is it? It is impossible—and nevertheless it is true! Here is the proof!"

He struck the letter he held in his hand.

In spite of his pallor and convulsive trembling, he appeared calmer; as frequently happens when a too

violent shock, which apppears unremediable, suddenly overtakes one.

He gave up the struggle. A gloomy resignation had taken possession of him.

Staggering, he gained the mantel-piece, took a match, and burned the letter slowly and automatically.

He then returned to his desk, seated himself, pressed a spring which opened a secret drawer containing a pair of pistols, took them out, assured himself that they were loaded, and said, coolly:

"Here is what will deliver me!"

He was still smiling.

"I should have done it long ago," he continued, "but for Jeanne—Jeanne, whom I love and have married; whose life I have associated with my own, infamous and accursed as it is. That is a crime which I can never repair or expiate. My death will be hers! I know it. Poor angel, why have you known me? Why did I love you? Ah! then was the time when I ought to have killed myself. You would have remained poor and unloved—but you would not be the Duchess of Kandos."

He gave a nervous laugh and replaced the pistols in the drawer, which he closed.

"One is always master of his life," he resumed, "and there will be time to come to this, to-night, after I have looked in the face the new danger which threatens me. On Jeanne's account, I owe it to myself to fight it out to the end—to the last hope—even beyond hope—for that is no longer left to me! Besides, I am tired of this struggle, which constantly reappears in blood and tears. I was not meant for this life. It is beyond my strength. Ah! Louis Clermont! cursed be the day on which I encountered you and fate attached you to me!"

He mournfully and silently walked to and fro for more than an hour, in his study; then, seating himself again at his desk, he took a pen and paper, and wrote:

"TO JEANNE!

"This is my will and my confession——"

It commenced thus:

"To-night my life shall be decided. Probably there will be nothing left for me to do but to die.

"To you, my adored Jeanne, shall be directed my last thoughts and the whole truth.

"Perhaps you may not curse me when you know what a horrible part fate has taken in my crimes, and what remorse I have felt ever since, under your beneficent influence, revived and illuminated by the generous flame of your love, I have finally judged and condemned myself.

"They say that angels only know how to forgive. Oh! if you could forgive me, my well-beloved Jeanne! I dare not hope it. Hear me, nevertheless! You shall at least know how much I love, as unworthy as I am of you, the noblest, most beautiful and best of women!——"

At eleven o'clock at night M. de Kandos ceased writing.

He did not read over what he had written, but placed the leaves spread before him in a large envelope, which he carefully sealed up.

On the envelope he inscribed this word: JEANNE.

Then he placed the packet in the drawer with the case of pistols.

At midnight the Kandos mansion was in a profound state of silent repose, as if everyone was asleep, or appeared to sleep. No light pierced the darkness which shrouded the front of the mansion, although there was a lighted lamp in the duke's study.

But he had carefully closed the blinds, and the velvet curtains, falling before the windows, intercepted every ray of light.

Exactly at midnight a singular cry, cautiously uttered, and twice repeated, arose on the air.

It was, in fact, the peculiar cry of the owl of the *pampa;* and the duke, who was at the small back-gate

in the rear of the garden, recognized it with a sad start.

Meanwhile he did not hesitate, but carefully opened the gate, at which he had been stationed alone for some minutes.

He found himself face to face with two persons, one small, and the other large.

The smaller one passed through first, and was followed by her companion, who shut the gate after them.

The night was dark; not a star shone in the obscure sky.

No words were exchanged.

The duke directed his steps toward the mansion. His two unknown companions followed behind him, walking carefully, so as to make no noise.

They thus gained the stairs and climbed the first flight, covered with a thick carpet which stifled the echo of their footsteps.

The duke opened his study-door, and stood aside in order to allow those who had given him this sinister *rendezvous* to enter; then he entered and closed the door, but, at the moment when he started to turn around, he felt himself seized from behind, and his arms clasped as if in a pair of vises.

He did not utter a cry, or make any movement.

It was Mono, Dolores' negro, who thus held him; and it was Dolores who stood before him, her eyes flashing, disguised in a man's dress, and holding in her small, nervous hand, which did not tremble, an open knife: Louis Clermont's knife.

"Duke of Kandos," said she, coldly, "do you recognize me?"

The duke regarded her fixedly for a moment.

"Mariquita!" he at length cried, with an accent of unspeakable surprise, or, rather, of inexpressible stupor, in which a kind of superstitious terror extinguished every other feeling.

"Yes, Mariquita!"

"Living!" he repeated.

"Yes, living! Which is equivalent to saying that you are going to die!"

She advanced a step toward him, raising her armed hand.

"Mariquita," said he, in a voice in which there was no anger, "why do you wish to kill me? What have I done to you?"

She stopped suddenly, and eagerly leaned forward, devouring him with her eyes.

"That voice," murmured she; "those features! Mono, let him go!"

The negro unloosed his hold, and the duke found himself free once more.

Dolores, or rather Mariquita, since such was her true name, violently seized his hands and drew him to the light.

"*Cuchillo*,* the *gaucho!*" she suddenly cried, drawing back in surprise, a prey to an emotion which shook all her supple and gracious figure.

"Not so loud!" murmured de Kandos.

"But where is the duke, then?" she at length resumed, with a disturbed air.

"Be silent, wretched creature! Oh! be silent!" said Jeanne's husband, with a motion of desperate terror, and his face covered with a cold sweat.

END OF FIRST PART.

*Spanish for *knife*.

PART SECOND.

THE INCENDIARY.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE DESERT.

THE day was about to close.

It was in the month of February, in the year 1866 (that is, three years before the events recorded in Part First), the mid-summer month of the province of Buenos Ayres, one of the four confederate states which constitute the Argentine Republic. A country as large as all Europe; inhabited by only three or four millions, not counting the Indians, who yet occupy nearly half the entire area of the Republic.

The sun, drooping to the horizon, threw his fiery rays upon a burning sky and an almost boundless plain. The parched earth was covered with yellow dust. This monotonous and melancholy *pampa* extends from the confines of Patagonia to the suburbs of the city of Buenos Ayres, spreading across many hundred leagues.

There was no spring, no verdure; no oasis in the desert. Not a tree save the *ombu*, which is found in solitary state at long intervals; and which is useless for either construction or fuel: knotty, and twisted, it resists the axe, and after it is broken, extinguishes the fire already kindled.

When the rainy season gives place to summer, the ardent rays of a sun never hidden or softened by the slightest cloud burns to dust the hardy young leaves which have just put forth. Not a drop of water in this dreary desert except brackish or stagnant ponds, which were made by the rains of winter, and which evaporate slowly in infected odors. As far as the eye can see, the naked plain touches the glassy horizon, sometimes deceiving the traveler with the mirage so familiar to the Arabs of the African Desert.

There is no movement—no sign of life, except the sinister flight of some lonely owl, which rises from the parched earth at the approach of a traveler, and follows, by preceding, the chance companion found in the desert.

It was six o'clock in the afternoon.

The red sun threw oblique shades of purple across the *pampa*.

No sound broke the solemn silence; nothing moved in the wide expanse of the dreary plain.

All at once there appeared in the distant edge of the eastern horizon a black spot. Then a slight cloud, which surrounded, or rather accompanied it, distinctly marked its movement westward. It grew larger and larger in that crude clearness of tone, peculiar to the tropics, where outline and color are perfectly definable through the transparent medium of misty dust.

It was a horseman advancing in a rapid gallop—a *gaucho*—not an Indian.

From his side floated the ends of his *poncho* (a piece of square cloth, with an opening in the center through which the head is thrust), leaving the arms free. The lengthening rays of the sun lit the barrel of a carbine, which hung to a broad strap that crossed above his right shoulder, the heavy silver spurs, and the richly ornamented bridle. All the rest was black—the broad-brim felt hat, the wide scarf, loosely tied about his throat, the *poncho*, the vest beneath, and the full loose trousers. This passion for black, beneath a fiery sky, would suffice to tell that the scene is in a country settled by Spaniards, where reigns the tyranny

of heavy cloth, of high boots, and of black. A man wearing a straw hat or light trousers might beg his bread, but he could not obtain employment. Even the *gauchos*, those half shepherds, half bandits of the desert, would not accept him as a comrade.

The horseman continued to advance—and when the rapidity of his gallop uplifted the *poncho*, it revealed a broad belt, heavily embroidered with silver, to which was attached the red scabbard of a broad-bladed knife, and the darker leathern-colored cover of a revolver. Without stopping his speed he constantly turned in the saddle, regarding with a curious look of anguish and apprehension the route whence he had come—the route from Buenos Ayres.

The direction he was going led to Chivilcoy,* a frontier town on the border of the Indian country; but from the movements of the horseman it was evident he had taken that route by accident. He had the air and manner of one who flies from danger, without knowing or caring where the path he takes may lead, or of one driven by terror or remorse for some terrible crime.

This man was about forty years of age, with dark brown hair and a full beard. The clear, expressive eyes were now bloodshot and clouded with the anguish of a sort of half furious, half desperate delirium. The features, although marked by the passage of all the passions, had a certain aristocratic distinction. He seemed broken by fatigue, and scarcely able to keep his saddle. The horse was no less worn than the rider. Covered with flakes of foamy sweat, he bounded forward as if directed by an impulse impossible to lose—a will impossible to resist. At every step blood marked the route—blood, from the constant pricking of the sharp-pointed spurs which the horseman buried in the sides of the tired animal whenever he slackened his rapid gait.

Such speed could not last. Man and horse were at the end of their force and endurance. The horse stumbled against the body of a dead ox, which had

* Pronounced *Tchi-vil-co-ye*.

given out in the desert, and man and beast fell in the midst of a cloud of green flies that were banqueting upon the putrid flesh.

CHAPTER II.

THE SAND-STORM.

IN the direction of the setting sun an immense curtain of brassy color, which reflected sinister shadows, was rapidly taking form. It seemed to spring from the earth, as if to veil the sun. It shaded the vast extent, until the *pampa* and the sky had the same frightful livid tint, the same solidified appearance, as if overhead and underfoot the compressed air was being forced through two parallel walls of sand; and, in truth, it was that which was being accomplished.

The *pampero*, the tempest of dust, the rain of sand, which, at times for weeks, drives back the tide of the *Rio de la Plata*, and sweeps the largest vessels back to the ocean; or catching them in its fury, it lifts them from their anchorage and lands them in the streets of Buenos Ayres, far above the liquid element to which they belong.

Words are impotent to describe the horror of this solid atmosphere, which displaces the transparency of the tropical sky—the fury of this wind of the desert, which uplifts its wide-spread covering of dust and sand, and whirling them seaward, bursts upon Buenos Ayres and the neighboring villages.

When it has passed it takes days, sometimes weeks or months, to efface the trace of its ravages. When accompanied by rain it spreads general ruin. Water and dust then mix and fall to the earth in thick, muddy streams, as in those great cataclysms of pre-historic times which geology has demonstrated.

The storm which struck the dismounted and unconscious horseman was only the dry sand storm of the desert. It burst upon him as he fell.

It seemed certain death.

It was his salvation!

The sting of the burning sand, which whipped his face and hands, roused him from unconsciousness. The comprehension of his danger reanimated his will, and strengthened him with that sudden tension of the nerves, which is even more daring and enduring than courage.

It enabled him to remove the body of his horse from above his leg—which was almost paralyzed by the heavy weight—and regain his feet. He could scarcely see a yard before him.

The sand, compact and hot, burned him as if he were in a furnace. The violence of the wind had taken his hat, and torn his clothing into fluttering rags; while the heated sand, striking his face, blinded him, and caused him intolerable torture.

An ordinary traveler would have been lost; but the *gaucho* knew the desert, and its homicidal convulsions. In spite of his fatigue, and his suffering, he did not despair. His greatest torment was thirst; he bent over the body of his horse, and, taking his knife from his belt, cut the artery in the neck and quenched his thirst in the warm blood of the dying animal. This strengthened and sustained him; he felt an almost instantaneous restoration of his failing force. He took his saddle and placed it on his shoulders, where it sheltered him from the whirling sand; he also provided for one chance he might meet in the desert—the capture of a half savage horse from some loose troop—by carrying with him the bridle and the *lasso* with which the *gauchos* capture these wild steeds. These preparations had consumed nearly an hour. To his joy he found the *pampero* was less severe; these storms are sometimes short. The wind was not so violent, the dust was clearing, and a pale, confused light permitted him to advance in a hap-hazard way on the trackless plain. After an hour's walk the night began to close in, but the storm had passed and the air was cooler. It was now possible to breathe without pain. The blood of his horse had given him a

momentary forgetfulness of his thirst; but that thirst had returned. He would have thrown himself upon the ground and slept, except for his thirst.

The moon rose in splendor over the now shadowless *pampa*.

Still he walked forward, bent under the weight of the heavy saddle.

There was the distant sound of bells, and a far-away bleating of sheep.

The *gaucho* threw off the saddle and turned to the point whence the sound had come.

A small red light in the distance indicated a *corral*. There were sheep; there must be *gauchos* in the corral. He would find shelter, and the rude but hearty welcome of the *pampa*.

He was saved!

CHAPTER III.

THE CORRAL.

THE corral of the *pampa* is simply a picket fence; the boards are fastened together by iron wire, which permits their being easily removed. Light bars form the entrance.

This corral, toward which the dismounted *gaucho* bent his steps, was full of sheep which were being driven to one of the immense slaughter pens nearer the coast, where the mutton could be sold to the slave-owners for food, and the skins and horns packed for the European markets.

Two men were lying on their blankets near the fire, at the entrance of the pen, talking, as they watched the cooking of their supper; one was over fifty, the other about forty years of age. Both wore the costume which has already been described as that of the *gauchos*.

The fire, which lit their faces, showed a more marked difference in features, and in type, than in their

ages. The weather-beaten face of the elder had a ferocious, yet singularly cynical and crafty expression, from which vice and misery had not altogether effaced a certain distinction. It was as if one had found the classic outline of a Roman face upon a worn medal, defaced by time and eaten by verdigris. Tall, thin, his hair an iron gray, he was gifted with a vigor and toughness which would have excited the admiration of an adept in the noble art of boxing, if his companion, who possessed these same qualities in a much greater degree, had not been present. His eyes continued the paradox in his appearance; they were quick in movement, and somber in color, at the same instant impudently challenging and furtively shunning the eyes of an interlocutor; thus causing inquietude while inspiring an irresistible repulsion. In a word, he was a man one would not care to encounter unarmed, or alone at night, when guarding a treasure.

The younger, equally thin and supple, but smaller, with large clear eyes, and, contrary to the habit of the *gaucho*, wearing only a dark, silky mustache, was remarkably handsome. The fatigue of his life on the plains, with its various trials; and the constant contest of the *gaucho* with wild horses and savage beasts had given a hardy, energetic, and almost threatening expression to a face which was a model of virile beauty. It was evident that he was a man of violent passions. But in repose his face expressed a profound melancholy; and a sweetness astonishing and unnatural in the wearer of such a costume and amid such savage surroundings.

The hides of sheep, freshly cured, were piled near by; some rolled and tied, others ready to roll.

Before the fire, hanging from a crane roughly constructed of iron wire and bars taken from the pickets, a sheep was roasting slowly. While waiting for it to cook to the point of perfection demanded by an epicure of the *pampa*, the men were talking.

"I tell you," said the younger, in excellent French, "I was not born for this life; it weighs upon me, it disgusts me, it is horribly tiresome."

"Humph! You are over nice, my good fellow," replied the elder. "When a man calls himself Cuchillo, or Louis Clermont, he has no choice in the manner of his existence. Do you regret the penitentiary? Return there! They would receive you with open arms. The *bracelets* are always ready." With a mocking laugh he rubbed his wrist and his left ankle.

"Who spoke of all that?" grumbled the younger. "Is there nothing between the galleys and this desert? The *pampa* is a prison, only the place is widened."

"It at least has no whipping-post, except the *pampero*, which has just given us such a lashing. Every touch of the hot sand recalled the touch of the guard's lash. You had forgotten the absent, my Cuchillo."

"Are we to be eternally compelled to live like the animals we keep? Did we escape from the prison and the delights you are so willing to recall, that we might live in the solitude of the *pampa*, away from cities and people—driven, broken, brutalized?"

"The fact is," interrupted Louis Clermont, with his perpetual laugh, "I would like better a richly furnished apartment upon the boulevard des Italiens; it would not displease me if the furniture was made by Potel and Chabot. Neither would it displease me to drive a pair of thorough-breds in the Bois. After a turn round the lake, and the drive to the cascade, I would not say no to a modest dinner at Philipe's, or to a banquet at the Cafe Anglaise. Neither do I think the opera would bore me, nor even the Folies Dramatique. But," he continued, affecting the drawl of the Paris dandy, "when one would evade a lasting misfortune, it is needful to endure bravely, for the moment, unavoidable privations."

"For the moment?" cried Cuchillo, with bitterness. "This life has lasted for three years, and I see no chance of change."

"We will find an occasion."

"An occasion! Where? Here?"

"It appears improbable—but the hazards may help, and they count for something."

Cuchillo shrugged his shoulders without replying. Again Clermont began:

"See! Let us examine the situation. We have escaped from the galleys—very well. It was difficult, and without the happy chance which made you my companion of the chain, you would have finished there the twenty years to which you were condemned. But that was nothing. The escape was not the difficult point—not to be retaken was the question. I knew *La Plata* in 'my stormy youth,' as the poets say. It is a blessed country for the persecuted and the unknown. This Argentine Republic should be called the Golden Republic. No extradition treaty ever soils her parchment. Besides, in the *pampa* every good fellow is a *gaucho*, and the police ask them no questions."

"Only when once here, always here!" Cuchillo exclaimed.

"Yes, without doubt for some time. Time to disappear—to be forgotten—for it to be thought the buzzards of the *pampa* have finished the criminal who is *wanted*. Well, that is done. At the galleys they have lost all trace of number 609 and of number 1127. The search is ended. We can now return without danger, by using some little precaution—a change of names, of course, a slight change of skin—dyeing is an easy trade to the experts who graduate at the galleys. We can fabricate papers that are perfectly *en regle*. The rest is a mere nothing."

"Well, why do you wait?"

"Why? simpleton! We have not a cent, and I do not wish to return to a civilized society in this garb. Without money—good-night to all friends! We would have to return to the old ways, and we would then be recaptured. '*Pas de ca Lisette!*' I have had enough of prison beans."

"I also."

"See how well we agree. Besides, I am old; I wish a tranquil life, a comfortable, easy life. I would take my rest; I love luxury."

Cuchillo looked at him with astonishment; then said with irony:

"You hope for all that?"

"A little, my nephew! With a start of good fortune nothing would be more easy."

"Parbleu! How sharp! It is evident that if we had an income of fifty thousand dollars, we would not stay here—after having been *elsewhere*."

"I have had that much," said Louis Clermont, rising.

"Possibly! But what you *may* have had, you have lost."

"Yes," said the old convict, with a somber air; "I have more reason to complain of fortune than thou, a miserable bastard who has never known the luxuries of life, and who grumbles at hardship as if he was a disinherited prince."

Cuchillo had bounded upon his feet, his eyes aflame.

"Hush!" said he, in a menacing tone, as he touched the knife at his belt. "Hush! or——"

Louis Clermont looked at him in silence; then he said, tranquilly, but in a conciliating voice:

"Be calm! You are as hot-tempered as a tiger-cat. I did not wish to insult you, but only to say that, having been rich, having held a position in the world, I would have better right to complain than you; then, too, I am older, my future is shorter; I have no time to lose, and, besides, I have not, like you, the consolation to know that the prettiest woman on this continent loves me with the warmth and the devotion of a creole. You have the *Marquesa*."

CHAPTER IV.

CUCHILLO MAKES HIMSELF KNOWN.

AT the name, "the Marquesa," Cuchillo trembled. "Alas!" murmured he, "there is the cause of my despair. Yes, Mariquita is adorable; her love would have made me happy in other conditions. In my sad youth I dreamed of such a wife—beautiful, spiritual, loving!"

"Well, you have won her; you are her lover."

"Yes; but she gives all, and I, nothing. My misery, my condition, is a shame to her splendor. I hide myself in the *pampa*, that her choice may not be known."

"Imbecile! You give more than you receive. She loves you, and that is everything. She has no prejudice; she catches her pleasures wherever she finds them. She prefers a *gaucho*, possibly because he *is* a *gaucho*. It is a new sensation, after the fading of other loves."

"Ah! there were others—possibly there are others now; she may deceive me at any instant!" cried Cuchillo, in an accent of dolorous rage.

"You know nothing."

"But I fear—I always fear; I have not seen her for three months. And while I am here in this cursed *pampa*, earning the pittance upon which I must live, she is in Bueno Ayres, surrounded by homage, beset with proposals; oh! how I suffer!" he added, with a gesture of anger more desperate than menacing.

"My word of honor, but you are a droll, good man," said Louis Clermont, regarding Cuchillo with a mixture of astonishment, disdain, and indulgent sympathy. "It would serve you right if I deserted you some

bright morning, only I cannot quite get my own consent; stupid as you are, our lives are bound together. Two stalwart fellows can more easily pull out of a difficulty than one could alone; besides, you are not destitute of resolution—only try to have a little good sense, to see things as they are. Mariquita is the first actress in Buenos Ayres. She is rich—that is no virtue—but she has an excess of devotion for you. There is nothing to prove that she deceives you; if you *know* nothing, why not believe—nothing."

"You have never loved!"

"My faith! No, I am not so stupid. But you are not so jealous as you think; what enrages you is your poverty, your inferiority, your inability to show yourself as the favored lover of the beautiful *prima donna.* I comprehend that—the glory of a conquest in publicity; there must be many witnesses of a victory."

Cuchillo was silent, and the old convict continued:

"After all, your present position is your own choice; more than twenty times she has offered you half her fortune."

"And never will I accept it," replied Cuchillo; "take money from *her*—never!"

"You are simply disgusting," laughed Louis Clermont; "if she would only offer it to me."

Without listening to the old man, Cuchillo continued:

"If I did that I should not have the right to kill her the day when I could be sure she deceived me."

"On the contrary. Only you should make sure of your half of the partnership funds."

"You are a miserable scoundrel. Leave me! Your presence is a worse horror than the solitary *pampa.*"

Louis Clermont shrugged his shoulders, and exclaimed:

"Monsieur is a saint; it was only a judicial error that sent him to the galleys. I beg a thousand pardons of my lord!"

Cuchillo looked at him, with eyes aflame. Then, as if feeling a necessity to say aloud something which was stifling him for utterance, he cried:

"I am a criminal—a murderer—it is true; but it was not to rob the dead that I killed a man; I was not a thief. But ten years of the galleys have made me a bandit, left me without scruples in this fight with the world. I killed the coward who threw in my face the misfortune of my birth—as *you* did, a few moments ago."

"You have told me that before."

"And you did not believe me?"

"I doubted; but now that I know you better, I fear it is true. Even such a stupidity does not surprise me."

"At present we are on the same plane; but if I had had a family, and a position—if I had been rich, as you have been, I should not be where I am, where taste, passion, and vice, has brought you."

"Continue; do not spare my modesty. I am breeched; I will not blush, continue."

"Yes," continued Cuchillo, passionately, to the listener who heard every word, although he feigned indifference. "Yes, that which has driven me to crime was the sense of the injustice of things. I was intelligent, capable, ambitious, yet miserably humiliated by inferiors whose position gave them their sole superiority. You were rich, you inherited an honest name, you belonged to a society into which I could not enter. I was a bastard, the son of a poor girl who was a foundling; I inherit only the name of *Pruneau*, which was given her in ridicule; I scarcely remember her. Perhaps she was kind and loving—but how can I say what she was. She died of want, leaving me upon the streets of Toulouse, when I was four or five years old. They put me in an orphan asylum until I was old enough to go out to service. The master of a school took me, taught me, and at last made me an usher."

"A brilliant career—which leads to fortune," laughed Clermont.

"No; certainly not brilliant, but considering my starting-point, it was above my hopes. Yet how I suffered in that school! I was young and not bad-looking; I saw life full of joys and luscious fruits which were beyond my reach. I had an instinctive love of pleasure; but I had a horror of the women who charmed my colleagues. One day a woman, such as I had seen in my dreams, distinguished me with her favor. I was then twenty-seven, and all the repressed passion of my life threw me at her feet. Another, rich, young, the heir of a distinguished name, was my rival. I insulted him, and he refused to fight with a bastard. *She* was present. I thought I should die of shame and rage. What would you have done in my place?"

"I would have killed him."

"That was what I did. I watched for him, followed him, and renewed the provocation. He repeated his insults. I threatened to horsewhip him publicly; he replied that he would have me sent to the house of correction. Then I sprang upon him, unarmed, except with the strength of youth, and of hate; I threw him upon the ground, caught up a stone, and killed him with one blow."

Cuchillo's visage told the story of this tragedy more perfectly than his words. The trembling body, the distorted features, the angry eyes, were frightful in their expression of mad rage.

"Not bad," interrupted his companion, who seemed to regard this violence and fury with secret satisfaction. "Not bad—only you should not have put yourself in a false position. You should not have taken his money."

"You lie!" yelled Cuchillo, losing all self-control. "Do not repeat that—retract it, or ——"

"My good fellow, I only repeat the fact which convicted you."

"An iniquitous, infamous judgment; the memory of the charge burns me—kills me! No—I never robbed him. No—no! Do you not believe me?"

"Yes; but ——"

"I fled from the place as soon as I saw that I had killed him. They did not find him until the next day. After my just vengeance was paid, some robbers found the body and robbed the dead. I could prove nothing. I could not deny that I had killed him—and —"

"They gave you twenty years of the galleys. It is that which procured me the pleasure of your acquaintance. We were chained together, and as I was not a brute, like the others, as I was a man of the world, who had fallen in turning a sharp corner, we were soon friends—for life, I do not doubt. But, my good fellow, do not despair. Two weasels of one kind, intelligent, resolute and acute, have not said this last word to Destiny after one capture. Believe me, there are beautiful days coming for Louis Clermont and Jean *Pruneau*, alias Cuchillo."

Cuchillo had fallen back upon his blanket and was silent for several moments; then sadly shaking his head, he murmured: "It is not possible!"

"Bah! All things are possible. We must avoid the old keepers and watch for our opportunity. Think, child of my heart, of our immense advantage over the ordinary brutes who ornament the penitentiaries. They are mere beasts, incapable of thought or reflective combinations; if they escape or are discharged, they return to the fold after having returned to their old ways. Their fashion, their type, denounces them. But we are different from all that. I have the air of a gentleman when I choose; and you, in spite of *Pruneau*, seem born one. A little care—a little watchfulness and waiting, and all is said. The world will take us on our word, and we are doubled in strength through our union. I tell you the future is ours, if we are adroit and patient."

"Have you any plan?" demanded Cuchillo, bruskly.

"No, my friend, I have something better."

"What then?"

"I have my eyes open. I am like a tiger, ready to fall upon the first occasion which passes my den. Whatever comes will be good—and nothing will escape my clutches."

As he spoke the dogs began to bark.

"Hurrah!—a visit," laughed Clermont.

The outline of a man was distinctly visible in the moonlight.

CHAPTER V.

THE VISITOR.

THE dismounted *gaucho*, whose course we have already followed, and whom we left at the moment he recognized the light of the corral, had dragged himself across the distance, and now prudently stopped at the barking of the savage dogs. Three times he struck his open palms against each other. It is the manner of ringing the door bell in South America, and there is a certain peril in neglecting the formality.

"You were not deceived," said Cuchillo, rising. "A guest arrives."

"What the devil has put him afoot?" replied Louis Clermont. "He has met with some misfortune."

Cuchillo advanced to meet the new-comer, followed by the dogs. They had stopped barking and silently waited the decision of their master.

"Ave Maria!"* said the stranger.

"God guard thee, friend!" Cuchillo answered in Spanish. "What do you wish?"

"Hospitality. I have lost my way, and I am nearly dead of hunger and thirst. My horse fell at the moment the *pampero* struck us. I had scarcely strength left to get here."

"You are welcome!" and Cuchillo extended his hand. "Come, friend, to the fire and to food."

When they reached the fire near the bars, the stranger's exhausted strength gave way. He fell heavily. His tired features, his sunken eyes, revealed his fatigue, his suffering. "Water!" he gasped.

"Hold!" said Louis Clermont to Cuchillo. "Give

* It is the salutation of the *pampa*.

him first a few drops of *cana*;* there is nothing like it when one is faint from exhaustion."

The old convict's "few drops" nearly half filled the gourd before the water was added. The gaucho drank it greedily, and then, with a sigh of content, said:

"Thank you! that has given me new life." While speaking he looked attentively and somewhat distrustfully at Clermont, who, with a stealthy glance, was critically regarding the unexpected guest. As their eyes met Louis Clermont turned away, and immediately began the preparation of *yerba*, the tea of the *pampa*. Its restorative and nutritive virtues make it second only to the coca of Peru. In privation and hunger it takes the place of wine and bread. It preserves health and strength in circumstances which would hopelessly exhaust the strength of the most vigorous constitution. The *yerba* was soon made, and as the gaucho drank with an air of profound satisfaction a transformation seemed worked in him. His relaxed frame regained new vigor, his eyes grew bright and clear. There was something of the miraculous in this sudden change.

During the time he was occupied with his guest, Louis Clermont watched him closely. He examined him from head to foot with a singular attention. He almost trembled at the sound of his voice, and in giving him the gourd of yerba, he bent over him in such a manner that his own face was in the shade while the firelight shone upon the face of the stranger. Unhappily, for his curiosity, the light was wavering and uncertain.

"Thanks, friends," said the stranger. "If a happy chance had not led me to your camp I would have been dead before another day."

"Do you come from afar?" asked Cuchillo.

"Yes; from Chivilcoy."

Cuchillo could not restrain a gesture of surprise. He was about to express his surprise in words when

* Brandy distilled from sugar cane.

Louis Clermont gave him a sudden touch, and Cuchillo turned away. It was evident that the stranger's story was false. Chivilcoy was only a short distance from the camp and in a direction exactly the opposite to the one from which he had come.

"The *pampero* caught you on the way?" said Clermont.

"Yes, friend."

"Happily it did not last long, for, dismounted as you are you could not have resisted it. What accident killed your horse?"

"He burst a blood vessel in falling, at the moment the storm burst upon the *pampa*."

"If one rides too far and too fast that often happens. Otherwise the horse of the *pampa* is hardy and strong. He endures much, but when his speed has been over-tried he cannot resist the *pampero*."

At this observation the stranger trembled, and even in the dim light Clermont could see that he had turned pale. With a hesitating voice he replied:

"Yes, I came far, and was riding fast. To-morrow I will explain to you my reasons."

"No one will question you," interrupted Cuchillo. "We do not belong to the police; and in the *pampa* a guest is welcome, no matter from whence he comes or whither he goes."

"Supper is ready," called Louis Clermont. He cut with his knife a large piece of mutton, and handed it on the point to the stranger, who, taking his knife from his belt, eat in *gaucho* fashion. It is the sole method for at least three-quarters of the population —meat without bread, plate or fork, cut in mouthfuls, and eaten frequently without even salt.

When hunger was fully satisfied the remains of the feast were thrown to the dogs, and again the comforting, reviving *yerba* was made in a large gourd, and passed in turn to the stranger and his hosts. Then Louis Clermont, rising, said:

"Now, to our blankets, and to sleep. To-morrow will be time enough for conversation."

"Willingly," said the guest. "I can scarcely keep my eyes open."

"Sleep then, without fear," replied Cuchillo. "Our dogs are watchful, and after the accident and fatigue of to-day slumber will be the best restorative."

Cuchillo had scarcely ceased speaking before the stranger was rolled in his blanket and asleep.

After some moments Cuchillo asked Louis Clermont, who was lying by his side:

"Why did you signal me to say nothing when he told us he came from Chivilcoy?"

"Because he lied!" replied his companion, in the same low tone in which the question was asked. "He has done something which has forced him to fly to the *pampa*."

"It is possible; but it is also possible that he lost his way."

"A real *gaucho* never loses his way in the *pampa*. Above all, he does not kill his horse, without reason, running him at the top of his speed."

"That is true."

"Besides, did you notice how he trembled and turned pale at every slight question?"

"Yes, I remarked that."

"And that he seemed suffering from anguish and fright, more than from fatigue?"

"Well; it is nothing to us!"

"Then," continued Louis Clermont, without listening to Cuchillo, "when I stooped over him in giving him the yerba, I remarked a singular circumstance."

"What?"

"One side of his beard is burnt off close to his face."

"Burnt! Are you sure?"

"Perfectly sure."

"That is strange; but what does that prove? A spark from his cigarette may have done that."

"That was not all."

"What more, then?"

"It seems to me that he is not unknown to me; his features, his voice, are familiar. They recall a distant

past which I cannot exactly define. To-morrow, at daylight, I will see, I will know."

"But are you not going to Buenos Ayres? It is your turn, and our supplies are out," added Cuchillo, with a sigh. He was thinking of Mariquita, and wishing he could go to the city.

"Yes; but I will start at two o'clock. I can get there at daylight, and be back about noon. You must manage to keep him here until I return; I must see him: I must know if I deceive myself."

"As you like. But what advantage can you possibly gain from the poor fellow?"

"One never knows how fortune may present her favors. By looking into everything, and disdaining nothing, fortune is often found—she may be hidden in a sack that is apparently empty."

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH THE READER WILL SEE IF THE PRESENTIMENT OF LOUIS CLERMONT WAS WELL FOUNDED.

AT midnight Louis Clermont awakened. All was calm in the camp: silence reigned in the desert, or was only broken by the distant cry of some solitary owl.

The stranger slept profoundly in the same position into which he had fallen when overcome by weariness and sleep.

Cuchillo's eyes were fixed upon the glimmering fire; it was evident that he had not slept. He closed his eyes as Clermont approached the fire, but the astute old scamp was not deceived; he shrugged his shoulders at this evidence of a lover's folly, and, without noise, saddled his horse; and leading him away from the camp, mounted, and took the direction of Buenos Ayres. He arrived there before daylight, and stopped at a little tavern in the suburbs, patronized by

the shepherds and *gauchos* of the fields and the *pampa*.

Even at that early hour a numerous society was still gathered around the tables, drinking and gambling, where, indeed, they had passed the night, held by that rage for cards which characterizes the Spanish colonist.

All were noisily talking of an event which had happened the night before this last one, which was now ended.

Louis Clermont inquired into the minutest details with the ability of a prosecuting attorney. Then, after having gathered all the information the loungers of the tavern could furnish, he walked rapidly to the scene of the drama which had electrified Buenos Ayres.

He had learned all the facts, and soon knew more than his informers. He rapidly made the purchases which had brought him to the city, and returned with as reckless speed as that which he had condemned in the *gaucho* the night previous.

He arrived at the camp before noon, and saw Cuchillo, whose impatience had brought him to meet the comrade he could see galloping over the pampa. Leaping from his horse, which was covered with foam, Louis Clermont asked:

"Is he still here?"

"Yes."

"What is he doing?"

"Nothing; he sleeps. I would not awaken the poor devil."

"Good! But I will awaken him; besides, I must see his features."

"What is it, then?" asked Cuchillo. "Something has happened!"

"Why?"

"You are so nervous, so excited!"

"In truth, I have learned something."

"But what is it?"

"You will know presently," said Clermont, and with

an indescribable look of uncertainty, he turned away. Cuchillo followed, saying:

"What is the meaning of all this mystery; is it some misfortune? Have you seen the *Marquesa?*"

"No!" gruffly answered the old bandit.

"Ah!" said Cuchillo, "but you have heard something. You have heard——"

"*Nom de Dieu!* Do not question me. I will tell you all, directly; there is no such haste."

Cuchillo was pale to the lips. He loved this woman, of whom Clermont had something to tell, with a passionate despair, compelled as he was by the circumstances of his life to see her only at long intervals. Heretofore, Clermont had always seen her—had always been in haste to tell the news he brought, the messages she sent to her lover by the friend who, until now, had never failed to see her. And now he knew something he would not tell. It was useless to interrogate him; Cuchillo knew he would only speak when he was ready. And there was a mystery which included the guest who had begged shelter and food; Louis Clermont was already staring down upon the features of the sleeper. Then there were sudden glances from the guest to Cuchillo, and from Cuchillo back again to the man who slept beneath this sinister inspection.

There was a strange resemblance between Cuchillo and the *gaucho:* the features were of the same model, as if they were casts of the same face. Hair and beard were alike in texture and color, except that Cuchillo's were a shade lighter, and he wore a mustache, and not the full beard ordinarily worn by the *gauchos.* They were alike in hight and form, and seemed of the same age; possibly the sleeper might be a year or two the younger. The unknown, again, like Cuchillo, was remarkably handsome, notwithstanding the worn look and the dusty traces of the *pampero,* which stained and partly disfigured his appearance. Nothing of all this was apparent to Cuchillo.

"Well," he said, impatiently, "if you have finished the comparison, will you tell me what it all means?"

Clermont laughed, without replying. Then he hid his face in his hands and reflected profoundly. When, at length, he looked at Cuchillo, his eyes had an infernal expression of malicious triumph which startled the lover of Mariquita.

"Let me hear what there is to be told! Are you mad? What is it? In the name of all the devils, tell me what has occurred!"

After another silent laugh, which, however, revealed his white, fang-like teeth, Louis Clermont said:

"I was not deceived last night; I know this man."

"Well, who is he? What——?"

Without listening to Cuchillo, Louis Clermont shook the sleeper, rudely crying in a loud, strident voice:

"You can sleep no longer. Get up! Get up, friend!"

The half-awakened man sprang to his feet in an agony of fright, his eyes wildly staring; he caught at the knife which hung from his belt, and drew it, exclaiming:

"Do not touch me! You shall not touch me!"

"Be calm! be calm!" said Clermont, with a significant tranquility; "you are with friends. If you were not, your action would denounce you."

"Denounce me!" murmured the stranger, trying to regain composure, as he remembered the events and the companions of the previous night; but he was still pale and trembling, when Clermont continued:

"We have already told you that we do not belong to the police, neither as agents, nor as spies; whatever you may have done, we will not arrest you."

"What do you say? I do not understand you; I have nothing to fear from the police or their agents."

The stranger had now mastered his fright; he had not observed the change in the language of his interlocutor. In the night they had only spoken Spanish; but Louis Clermont had awakened him with French

words, and so naturally, that it proved French was his native language; the stranger had answered him, and still continued to speak the same tongue.

Taking a tone of obsequious politeness, and bending before the stranger, Louis Clermont answered:

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur le Marquis—but yesterday there was, at Buenos Ayres—a murder, followed by a fire. *You were the murderer! You were the incendiary!*"

CHAPTER VII.

THE MARQUIS.

HE who was thus accused, and whom Louis Clermont had saluted by the title of marquis, at first stood as if thunderstruck. Terror and despair discomposed his bronzed visage, whose expression of hardness and threatening violence had disappeared, to be replaced by the anguish of a man who believes himself lost.

"It is false! it is false! You lie!" muttered he, finally, in a half-choked voice, while his eyes looked around for some means of escape or safety.

A vain search, however; a last, foolish hope.

He was on foot, and the immense solitude which surrounded him formed a more formidable barrier than the highest walls and strongest iron gates of the best-guarded prison.

Besides, those with whom he now found himself did not appear to have any evil intentions toward him.

Louis Clermont preserved his polite expression, and assumed a gentlemanly manner and carriage which singularly contrasted with his costume, general appearance, and the tone of his preceding words.

As to Cuchillo, surprised as he was at this unexpected and theatrical stroke, it was plain that the man accused of murder and arson only inspired him with

a sort of pity, without any mixture of horror or antipathy.

He had been too accustomed, for many years, to living in the company of the worst scoundrels of two worlds, to experience that first emotion of indignation and horror which the sight of a criminal makes all honest men feel.

"Do not be disturbed, Monsieur le Marquis," replied the old convict, with an aspect in which respect was mixed with an expression of sympathy. "Reassure yourself. I repeat, you are with friends; and if terror did not partly paralyze your usual faculties, you would have recognized me already, as I recognize you, in spite of the years which have passed and the strange dress in which we find each other."

"I—I do not know you," murmured the stranger, slightly reassured, but still defiant, and scarcely recovered from the terrible shock he had just experienced.

"Ah! that is because you have not, like myself, the memory of affection. But *I* am never deceived, and at the first glance, by daylight, I was certain it was you. Let us proceed to introductions. That will completely reassure you."

His interlocutor now fixed on him a look a little less troubled, and one could see on his face the effort of thought seeking to recall former memories, still confused, but which commenced to dawn upon his consciousness.

"Friend," pursued Louis Clermont, in a calm tone, turning toward Cuchillo, "I have the honor to present to you Monsieur le Marquis Paul de Kandos, only son of the Duke of Kandos, an old and wealthy gentleman of Franche-Comte."

At these words Cuchillo opened his eyes, while the marquis turned pale and red in turns, at finding himself so well known, and at hearing all his titles thus indicated, which, most certainly, on this occasion, and under the present circumstances, did not seem to cause him any feeling of gratified vanity.

Nevertheless he no longer endeavored to make de-

nials—but kept silent, knowing neither what to say nor what to do.

"Marquis," added Louis Clermont, "I present to you my best friend and old companion—in misfortunes, Jean Pruneau—commonly called '*Cuchillo.*'"

The latter made a stupefied gesture.

"Be silent! You imprudent fellow!" he whispered in his companion's ear.

"Let me alone!" replied the other, in a low tone. "I know what I am about!" And he continued aloud: "He has had misfortunes—like yourself. Only less fortunate than you have been—up to the present—he expiated his through a condemnation, from which he escaped. He sought a refuge on the *pampa*, as you, yourself, have also just done. You can plainly see, then, that you have nothing to fear from him, and that he is no more capable of denouncing you and delivering you up to justice than I am."

The Marquis of Kandos—for it was indeed he—breathed freely for the first time. It was evident that at last he commenced to feel reassured, on understanding that he was in the presence of men who could not lay claim to any great degree of virtue or honesty—that is, from a legal stand point.

"As to me, who have also had my share of misfortunes," continued the astute convict, always in the same considerate and sympathetic tone he had so suddenly adopted, "I would be killed in order to save you, or to be useful to you. . . . Look, Paul! Do you not recognize him whom I dare to call your old friend, your former companion, and the guide of your youth—Louis Clermont?"

Paul de Kandos trembled from head to foot at these words, and hastened toward the speaker, as if he wished to get a better view of him.

Louis Clermont seized his hands.

"Yes," he cried, warmly, "look at me well. It is I—*I*, I tell you!"

"In fact," murmured the astonished marquis. "It is really you—here—in this costume! But it is such a long time since we have seen each other ——"

"Twenty years! By Jove! one grows old. Besides, my life has been hard, sometimes. Still, I was not mistaken."

"But, I so little expected to see you again—in this desert ——"

"We were better off in the Parisian drawing-rooms, or in the watering-places, casinos, where *roulette* so nicely cleaned us out. Is it not true?"

A cloud passed over Paul's face.

"Yes, I remember—now—" said he, in a gloomy tone.

He stopped and took breath, raising his head with a more open and joyful air.

"It matters little—I am happy at finding you once again. Ah! this is fortunate—it revives hope—for you will save me?"

"Parbleu!"

"So, fortune has been no kinder to you than to me?" he added, regarding Clermont attentively.

"Faith, no, judging from appearances. And I regret it, for both our sakes."

"It is as it should be, after all," replied the marquis, with a slight touch of bitterness. "Neither of us took, at that time, the road which leads to fortune, consideration, glory and—honor," he sadly added. "Clermont, you were the cause of my ruin!"

"Stay, my dear friend! Do not be unjust toward yourself, and do not make me out greater than I am. You had a very pretty disposition of your own!"

"I was young, foolish—but neither wicked nor innately corrupt. If my father had taken another course with me, and if I had not met you—at the psychological moment—as the German philosophers call it—my life might and would have been different. To-day I would be a sober-minded and rich man—living on my own lands, near the duke. And I would not be a miserable fugitive, concealing myself, trembling for my head!"

He shuddered, ceased speaking, and looked around, as if he feared to see all the representatives of Justice assembled about him.

"Be calm, dear friend," interrupted Louis Clermont. "I have just come from Buenos Ayres ——"

"Ah!"

The unfortunate man became livid.

"I know all!"

He bowed his head.

"But no one suspects the part you played in that affair, which passes for a simple accident, for a casual, though terrible, misfortune. The city is in a state of genuine sorrow."

"You are not deceiving, in order to reassure me? No one knows? They do not accuse me?—are not looking for me?"

"Not the least in the world. There were no witnesses. When they arrived the fire prevented their entering the house. It destroyed everything—*everything!*" repeated Louis Clermont, with a marked emphasis.

"All—all?" replied the marquis, in a voice in which one felt the far-away echo of a real horror mixed with a sort of ferocious joy.

"Yes!"

There was a short silence.

Paul de Kandos wiped his face, which was bathed in sweat.

All at once his expression changed, and it was with a sudden look of anger, although in a low voice, that he said:

"But, then, how do you know?"

"That it was you?"

"Yes," said he, shaking his head with a threatening air.

"My dear marquis, it was plain, last night, that you were fleeing from something, when Providence conducted you to us. You had the look and manner of one who was in terrible fear. . . . You oozed crime, so to speak. Then you insisted that you had come from Chivilcoy, though your back was toward Buenos Ayres. Finally, on offering you the *yerba*, I observed that half of your beard was burnt off."

Louis Clermont's ex-companion convulsively carried

his hand to his face and felt his beard. The hand fell back discouraged.

"When I knew what had happened, this morning," pursued the former convict, "I guessed that you were the author of—the *disaster*."

"But, you did not know it—you had no proofs?"

"None. Your awakening denounced you—so did the circumstances. I feigned knowledge to know the truth! There is the whole history for you. Now you have confessed!"

"What you have done was infamous, Clermont!" answered the marquis, with concentrated fury.

"If I wished to make an ill use of it, yes. But we are friends. I will prove it to you. And you will be glad, before long, to have some one in whom you can confide, auditors to whom you can tell all. It comforts and consoles one!"

The marquis hesitated an instant. His look had become gloomy; but this did not last.

"So be it!" said he. "Perhaps you are right! In any case, since you have half of my secret, I will tell you the rest. . . . And, if you can assuage the anguish which oppresses me since that frightful moment—eh! well—I will be still more your obliged servant."

"Speak, then! Cuchillo, here, is another self. We have not been separated for thirteen years. We are joined like the fingers on the same hand, one might say. United in Love's chains!" added he, in a low and tantalizing voice. "There are some others—which unite still closer! He and I are one. We are three, but only count as two. You can tell all before him. I will listen to nothing without him."

"By Jove! it will not be any too soon!" finally cried Cuchillo, who till now had silently assisted at the conversation, "for I would gladly understand that which has passed, and, up to the present, I do not in the least see into it."

"That is because there are histories in my life which you do not know. Monsieur le Marquis is about to give you these lost chapters."

CHAPTER VIII.

PAUL DE KANDOS.

THE three men drew closer together.

On a sign from Louis Clermont, they rested upon the ground, near the large wagon, whose shade protected them from the heat of the sun.

The two ex-convicts rolled cigarettes and tranquilly lit them, like people determined to neglect none of their enjoyments, while listening to the long recital, in regard to which Cuchillo was far from foreseeing the passionate and terrible interest it would soon possess for him.

Who could have believed that the lives of these two men, the one a son of a family bearing a great name, the other a child of chance, born and brought up in the gutter, would prove to be so intimately connected, although they had never before met each other, that in a little while, the marquis's every word would be a dagger's stroke for the escaped galley slave.

They looked at each other, meanwhile, with a certain surprise whose exact cause escaped them.

To each the other did not appear an absolute stranger.

Louis Clermont, whom this surprise, this discreet and unconscious investigation, did not escape, smiled in his beard.

He alone, indeed, had the key to their sensations. He alone possessed the secret of the near future, and foresaw the tragical end to the marquis's narrative, which would certainly produce a rencounter between these two individuals placed at opposite extremities of the social scale, and whom vice and misfortune had brought together for the first time.

That which puzzled Cuchillo and Paul de Kandos was, in fact, their strange mutual resemblance; a resemblance which, for each of them, made the other possess something of the *already-seen*, the *already-known*, yet for which they could not explain the reason to themselves.

There was a momentary silence.

Paul de Kandos seemed hesitating, and troubled. It was evident that the recital they expected from him was painful to him.

Pride was the foundation of his character, and the directing motive of his actions.

Now, in these circumstances, he suffered from the miserable aspect under which he appeared to a stranger, miserable as was the stranger himself; and he felt a repugnance to relating the criminal, or at least culpable, deed which had crowned the long years of a life which had had its brilliant days.

One would have said that Louis Clermont read his thoughts, and that he also desired, on his part, to postpone the final avowal, and leave, as long as possible, in the shade, the event to which he had alluded on his return from Buenos Ayres, unexplained to Cuchillo, for he suddenly cried:

"Monsieur le Marquis, I can guess at, and understand your embarassment and hesitation. As for me, I know you—who you are, and what you are worth—but my friend Cuchillo, after all, is ignorant in regard to both. On the other hand, it is twenty years since circumstances separated us, and I am interested in my former youthful companion; I desire to learn from your own lips what you have done, what you have become, and what fatal circumstances have brought you to the camp of two proscribed refugees on the *pampa*. So please commence at the beginning; tell us your life in detail.

"That part which I know I will again listen to with pleasure. It will rejuvenate me and recall a past which I love, because we lived it together. Then, you can enter upon the years in which I had lost sight of

you, until to-day, marked with the cross of fate, which has at last restored you to me!"

Paul de Kandos attentively listened to Louis Clermont; he made a sign of eager acquiescence, and appeared greatly comforted at a proposition which enabled him to commence his long recital with the brilliant part, and postpone the confession of the terrible crime which he had just committed, the least reminder of which made him turn pale and his blood run cold.

"So be it!" he responded, without hesitation. "I prefer it thus. For the actual denouement of my life," his voice slightly quivered, "is but the result, the inevitable consequence of former deeds—and in order to comprehend the frightful, but just, act which I have so lately committed" (he ground his teeth and his eyes recovered their ferocious and threatening look), "it is necessary to have heard what went before it."

He passed his hand over his forehead with a sort of rage, and, addressing Cuchillo, resumed:

"If, then, monsieur has the patience to listen to me ——"

"Speak!" said Cuchillo. "I also am a victim of certain circumstances independent of my own will, and what you say of your life applies only too well to my own for me not to be an auditor—such as you ought to desire."

"And I, also—I swear," interrupted Clermont, in a half-railing voice, "that you will never find a more eager, interested auditor, nor one who will take more interest in your adventures—whatever they may be—than myself. Above all, forget nothing, monsieur le marquis. Neglect no detail, I pray you!"

He gave a silent and malicious laugh, to which his pre-occupied companions paid no attention, and the new-comer commenced in these terms:

"As Louis Clermont has told you, sir," he addressed himself particularly to Cuchillo, "my name is Paul de Kandos. I am a marquis and only son, as well as heir, of the old duke of Kandos, who is a millionaire three or four times over.

"I therefore bear the name of one of the oldest families of *Franche-Comte*, a family of Portuguese origin, as the termination of the name indicates, although the orthography has been disfigured by changing the original C to a K.

"I may say," he added, with a sort of bitter bravado, "that this name of Kandos is one of the fairest names of France."

"As you bear one of the ugliest," interrupted Louis Clermont, in his mocking and strident voice, addressing Cuchillo, who trembled, turned pale, and cast upon his companion a glance full of wrath. But he remained silent.

"No one should have been happier and more envied than I," continued Paul de Kandos; "no one should have led a greater or easier life."

He clasped his hands.

"No one has led a life more defiled, more painful, more miserable, oftentimes—and finally more atrocious!"

"Pshaw! nonsense!" said Louis Clermont. "There still remain the duke's millions, for he is alive yet, is he not?"

"Yes; but he is very old, very much broken, and very near his end, it appears."

"So much the better!" philosophically murmured the ex-convict, half aloud. "The inheritance is all the nearer—since the law does not permit the direct descendants to be disinherited."

Paul did not hear, or appeared not to hear, him.

"He has even become blind, I have been told, and for years has not quitted his chamber."

"Ah!" quickly cried Louis Clermont, raising himself on his elbow. "Ah!—ah! he is blind? The poor man! After all, you haven't so much to complain of, and as old as I now am—if Providence held in reserve for me a father worth three or four millions, of which I would be the unquestioned heir, eh! well, upon my word, I would not grieve myself. What do you say to it, Cuchillo? Wouldn't that change our position? Ah! a well-invested fortune, a good little *chateau*, with a nice

fat little income! How easy it makes life, and how it would transform a man!"

"Yes," responded Cuchillo, in a hollow voice, "but everyone is not born the son of a millionaire duke; it even appears that that does not always prevent one's falling, for the marquis does not seem, at present, much better off than ourselves."

"That is my father's fault," violently replied the marquis, doubtless taking this remark for a reflection upon, or an indirect lesson to, himself. "Yes, it is his fault. It is his avarice, his hardness, his narrowness of mind and obstinacy, which spoiled my life and lost me! He was, perhaps, not a wicked man—and I believe that he loved me—in his own fashion; but my nature could not submit itself to his ideas of paternal discipline and authority—to the rules of the old school. I was rich; I was a gentleman; all who came near me talked of my great name, my rich inheritance, and yet all that brought me nothing! Well then! I became enraged at this barren fortune!"

"I do not understand it," said Cuchillo, with an astonished air.

"Still, it is very simple. In the first place, I ought to tell you that I lost my mother while an infant; I have no remembrance of her. So my father remained the sole master and director of my childhood; he was a gloomy and disappointed man, shut up in his immense possessions at Doubs, which he never left, not even for a moment, from the time I reached my tenth year; and each day he became more avaricious. Under the pretext of certain idiotic principles, or, rather, an economy, grotesque in our position, he had me as severely brought up as a peasant's son; he subjected me to a sort of monastic life: Dressed in course clothing, nourished in a fashion 'simple and frugal' —to employ his own words—knowing that I ought to have lived in abundance. I was deprived of all pleasures, and treated like a slave; all my actions were regulated to the minute, without any toleration for the infraction, however small it might be, of the discipline imposed upon me.

"In summer I arose at daybreak, like our peasants, and my father also. In winter they made me dress, shivering and desperate, by the light of a candle.

"'It is healthier!' said my father. 'One should rise early!'

"Why? No one ever knew; it was a ridiculous mania. Ah! I still remember those dreadful winter mornings, when I opened my eyes to the smoky light of a poor candle. Silence reigned supreme everywhere around us, for we lived in the open country. The heavy darkness was full of a wet or frozen atmosphere; it made the immense and gloomy room cold as an ice-palace. The rain plashed sadly against the windows, or the wind wept with long sighs of agony; I had to quit my luke-warm couch, hastily dress—after washing in half-frozen water—and then place myself before a frugal breakfast, still benumbed, half awake, and frozen to the marrow of my bones. I had to go to work, to study lessons, to learn the catechism, and to read Latin and Greek!—Phew!—I figure to myself that a man condemned to death, when they awake him before day to announce that his last hour is come, ought not to suffer much more than I thus did, every morning for ten years."

The marquis made an angry gesture, and then continued:

"My father, still following his ideas, pretended that the last representative of the noble Kandos family could not go to college with the first peasants who chose to come; he had read, somewhere, that it was the 'thing' for a great man to himself supervise his son's education; and so he did. That was his only expense on my account! He would be able to economize that with the rest. So I had for professors foundered and crabbed old *abbes*, or poor, canting devils of seminarians, who made me study, fourteen hours a day, the *De viris* and the *Acts of the Apostles*, besides a lot of equally pleasing works. All this restraint brutalized me! At seven o'clock I had a quarter of an hour, to swallow a morsel of dry bread; still another paternal theory:

"'Dry bread and clear water fortify children's stomachs.'

"Afterwards I went back to work till mid-day. Then we dined; I would seat myself at table between the duke and my preceptor. I must not speak during the repast.

"'Children should wait till they are questioned.'

"They never questioned me. I must not ask the second time for a dish which had pleased me, not even for bread.

"'Children should wait till they are served.'

"And they never served me but once.

"I drank water.

"'Children ought not to drink wine.'

"What happened, later on, was that, in secret, I drank with the peasants!"

"Yes, I knew something about that," interrupted Louis Clermont, sneeringly.

"Parbleu! when you came to the house we went and got drunk together!

"I must not take more than a quarter of an hour for eating! The dessert arrived, I was sent into the garden.

"'Children should not eat dainties! It ruins their teeth, and makes them epicures.'

"All this time they drank and regaled themselves at my father's table, for he loved the bottle and good eating. This was his only expense, outside of my preceptors, who all loved, also, the pleasures of the table, the only ones not forbidden to church-people and devotees. As for me, I was in the garden, where I had an hour to amuse myself, all alone, and to restore the circulation in my limbs, both winter and summer.

"'Children ought not to mind inclemencies of the weather.'

"It was then that, like a thief, I stuffed myself with green or rotten fruit, in danger of the perils attending marauding. At the end of an hour, frozen or roasted, according to the calender, they *glued* me afresh to the *De viris* and the *Acts of the Apostles* until six o'clock,

when they again placed themselves at table. At this meal I was allowed nothing but soup; all children have a horror of soup: so the parents have declared, in their profound wisdom, that there is 'nothing more healthful and better for children.' My soup swallowed —to bed.

"And the next day it all commenced over again!

"Do you see that this was the penalty I paid for being a marquis, the son of a millionaire duke? But the unfortunate children of our miserable peasants were a hundred times happier than I! They, at least, had no preceptors, and they worked in the fields and had their little comrades; my grandeur attached me to the chateau, which means that I tormented myself! No, no one ever tormented himself as constantly.

"And fete days! When there were fairs in the neighborhood! I never had a cent to spend for a plaything or a cake, or a morsel of a peasant's biscuit!

"'Children have no need of money!'

"Another aphorism invented by the avarice of parents.

"Why shouldn't they have money? Haven't they needs and desires, like older people? So much so that one fine day I stole some pennies from one of the servants, in order to buy some ginger-bread, with which I gave myself a stomach-ache.

"In this manner I attained my eighteenth year, and it was then, that, my father's physician having declared I would become idiotic, and needed exercise and the developing of my weakly body, the author of my being decided to have me taught fencing and riding by a certain Louis Clermont, here present."

CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH HE WHO SHOULD HAVE FORMED THE BODY, DEFORMS THE MIND.

"NOTHING could be more exact," interrupted Clermont. "I read your astonishment in your eyes, Cuchillo; you believed that you knew me, and you were ignorant of all this part of my life, as well as of my connection with the noble house of Kandos."

"I acknowledge it, and I cannot explain to myself your discretion on this subject."

"My good fellow, it is never necessary to tell all, even to one's best friend."

He sneered, silently.

"But the moment has come for filling up the gap," added he, in a singular tone. "Will you permit me, Monsieur le Marquis, to interrupt you for a few moments?"

"Yes, go on!" said Paul de Kandos, gloomily, and once more falling into his sad pre-occupation.

"Eh, well, dear friend, when I arrived at the duke's I was thirty years old—and ruined for the second time. After having eaten up, or, rather, lost at play, my paternal inheritance, I continued the same system with my wife's dowry, for you know that I had married to better my condition——"

"Yes, and you were even a father, if I do not deceive myself——"

"Of a lively little fellow, who ought to be a great big one by this time, if he is not dead. Now, horses fight with their grooms when there is no more hay—which means, that, tired of Madame Clermont's tears, reproaches, and victimized airs; having nothing left

of the marriage but a wife and a baby, without a radish, crippled by debt, pursued, humiliated, I cut loose from it all, and made for the provinces, seeking a good place, and a new social position, under the name of Jerome Paturot; my star conducted me to Franche-Comte.

"It is on the Swiss frontier, in which country, in case my creditors discovered my retreat, I could take refuge.

"There I fell into fresh trouble, and remained scheming at the hotel, where I could not pay my expenses.

"I was about to strike some unlucky blow, when I learned the Duke of Kandos was seeking a master of arms to complete his son's education and crown the edifice he had built by developing the muscle of the young man, who had become a skeleton through the abuse of Greek and Latin.

"Mine host, fearing that otherwise he would never be reimbursed for his advances, offered me the place, and promised he would greatly exert himself to obtain it for me if I would consent to accept it. He was a devotee—as they all are there, and, by obtaining the interest of some *cures* of his acquaintance, nothing could be easier. I did not know where to lay my head if I lost this shelter. Master of arms and professor of equestrianism!—the thing appeared droll. The duke was a millionaire. I thought that the company of these millions could not but be agreeable or advantageous to me—that there would always be something for the fingers of an able man to pick up, and then this would give me breathing time—to look about. In short, I accepted! I was presented to the duke. He was displeasing to me, and I was far more so to him. Yet in this manner I entered his service to instruct monsieur le marquis in the use of the horse and the sword, in return for board, lodging and one hundred and fifty francs a month—about enough to buy my cigars with!"

Louis Clermont interrupted himself in order to light a new cigarette, and resumed:

"My dear pupil exaggerated nothing just now. I have never seen a household in which avarice and regularity were carried to such an extreme. It equalled a convent or the galleys."

He laughed, sneeringly.

"I entered upon my probation! My pupil was presented to me. I saw a poor, pale and roguish little fellow of eighteen, with a simple and cunning air, as lazy as a snake, and as ignorant as a fish—of all that concerned 'life,' wearied, inwardly exasperated, and ruled only through habit and fear. But he had large teeth, to bite at all the forbidden fruits, and he only awaited the occasion to open the door or the window to all his passions and desires, kept under from the day of his birth. He brooded over revolt, for which he was eager, only the poor innocent did not know how, and did not dare inaugurate his independence for want of a little knowledge, and, above all, of a little bit of encouragement. He needed a guide! This gave me pain.

"In place of becoming disgusted with each other, I resolved to distract ourselves and to warm up this worm who only asked to be allowed to come out of his cocoon in order to shape his wings. This appeared amusing to me.

"'Ah! they wish me to make a man of him and complete his education!' I said to myself. 'Eh! well, wait—it will not take long. We are going to laugh——'"

"And indeed it did not take long," replied Paul de Kandos, with an air both of satisfaction and bitterness. "Jove! what an instructor!"

"You flatter me, my dear marquis. The pupil was wonderfully apt. I would not repeat it except 'to render homage to truth.' I had but to pronounce the famous '*fiat lux*,' and there was light."

"Yes, it was indeed the light and the open air which entered into my existence," pursued the duke's son. "It seemed to me as if the darkness and suffocation in which I had till then lived disappeared before an enchanter's wand. Ah! the fine nights we enjoyed together! and which appeared so delicious to me. All

the more delicious that mystery, deceit and fear were mixed up in each success; that we had to hide ourselves as criminals; lie, deceive, and play out the comedy. My dear master, you were astonishing, for coolness, inventiveness, and presence of mind. The chateau and lands of the Kandos family were only a few miles from Besancon. An hour's ride took one there, and there I went to a *cafe* for the first time in my life—for the first time in my life I was presented to women."

"Yes, very genteel, upon my word," interrupted Clermont. "Already gotten up like a gallant, with his provincial airs. I was the one who took him up, elevated him and dressed him. . . . Ah! like Cuchillo, the women asked only for *him* ——"

"But it requires money for all that," said Cuchillo.

"And I had none, it is true," replied Paul.

"And it was not with my hundred and fifty francs a month," snarled Louis Clermont, "that one bought all those pleasures—even at Besancon!"

"But my worthy master taught me the value of my name and title, as the only heir to the Duke of Kandos. I found credit and usurers—all the more easily that in three years I would be entitled to my mother's fortune, which, although small as compared with my father's, amounted to several hundreds of thousands of francs."

"I understand," said Cuchillo.

"That went as if on wheels," pursued the duke's heir, "for three months. Unfortunately thirst comes from drinking, and impurity encouraged us. The days were no longer sufficient for me. I wanted the nights. That was what lost all. Getting out of bed was not easy. I still remember with what trepidation, when all were asleep in the house, I arose, as did also Louis Clermont, who shared my room. We descended the stairs, like thieves, barefooted, and with our hats in our hands. We had to pass before the duke's door, and he slept so lightly that he could have heard a mouse scamper, and the floor creaked exactly at that spot.

"We took half an hour to cross over this obstacle."

"We called it the *Cape of Good Hope*," added the old *gaucho*.

"Then we had a long court to traverse, without being seen; then came the large gate, a key of which Clermont had doubtless stolen."

"I had had it made from an imprint, and I had oiled the lock and hinges."

"What intoxication, then, when I felt the fresh air, and saw space before me! Those were the greatest joys of my life."

He stopped for a moment.

"I have paid dearly for them; this is what they have finally brought me to."

He cast a gloomy look around him.

"Tut! tut!" sneered the convict. "The future remains to you—and papa's millions."

"Ah! I shall have bought them at more than they are worth! In short, Clermont, there are moments in which I hate you!"

"Eh, well, and I only feel joy at seeing you again," said the other, with his ironical laugh. "But please continue, Monsieur le Marquis."

"One fine morning, all went to pieces; I was betrayed, denounced, I know not by whom. One day, or rather night, on returning at an hour when everyone ought to have been still asleep, I found my father awaiting me behind the door, with a large rope in his hand.

"It was horrible!"

The marquis became pale at this recollection, and ground his teeth.

"I was eighteen," he resumed, in an altered voice; "I was a man in age, and had become a hundred times more so through my new habits—should I live a thousand years, I will never forget the humiliation and atrocity of that scene. My father, who was as strong as a peasant, threw himself upon me, seized my collar with one vigorous hand, and, with the other, beat me with the rope——"

"Thunder and lightning! Couldn't you defend yourself?" violently cried Cuchillo.

"You speak of it at your ease, sir!" replied the last of the Kandos family, while his face was covered with cold perspiration at the remembrance. "Ever since I was born I had trembled before the duke—I had never dared to look him in the face, nor to answer him. I cannot say I had any respect for paternal authority, since I made fun of it privately; but I had the habit of obeying it; and I had been brought up with religious ideas, by churchmen who had sung to me that a father, in the eyes of children, represented God and His all-powerfulness. I struggled, nevertheless; but feebly, without energy, unwillingly—solely on account of grief and humiliation. Our servants were there; that was frightful and ignoble! The duke only left off when I fell to the earth, half fainting, more from rage and confusion than from the results of his blows, although I carried their marks for a long time."

"Well! and you, Clermont, the responsible author of it all—you were not there, then?" cried Cuchillo, with a generous indignation, which was astonishing in a man of his kind.

"My good fellow," tranquilly responded Louis Clermont, "I was there, without being there. The duke, after his son's entrance, had re-closed the door in my face with such a ferocious air that—in short, I was outside; I could hear very well, but I could do nothing. And you can suppose that I never repassed through that door; that was the end of my happiness—in the chateau of Kandos."

"Then you never returned there?"

"I did not say that; but not by the door, most assuredly."

"My father," precipitately resumed the marquis, "picked me up, and dragged, or rather carried me, almost at arm's length, into a small, obscure, and close room, with a grated window, very much resembling a prison cell; it was situated on the ground floor. He threw me in there like a bundle, and closed and

double-locked the door, carrying the key off with him. I remained for nearly an hour sobbing from rage and grief, biting my fingers, and rolling on the ground like a wounded animal. At length I recovered sufficient coolness to look around me; the only furniture in the room consisted of a folding-bed, a straw chair, and a pine table. On the table was a piece of black bread, in a corner a pitcher of water; it was indeed a prison—and I was treated like a prisoner."

CHAPTER X.

THE SERPENT.

"I REMAINED in this condition a week, without seeing any other person than a vigorous peasant, an ignorant brute, who had been in my father's service for twenty years; a fanatic, brought up on examples from the Bible, who, on a sign from the duke, would have made my flesh into a meat-pie, while citing Abraham.

"He was incorruptible, I assure you, and endowed with uncommon strength; of such a sort that, in confiding the care of my person to him, one would have nothing to fear, neither that I could seduce my jailer, nor that I would try to escape by force.

"During this week I lived on bread and water, and reflected at leisure. It was at this time, I believe, that my character became fully developed.

"Resistance had taken possession of me, along with fury and hatred. I had tasted life, liberty, and pleasure; my disposition was changed, my appetites were awakened. My father's conduct, in wounding my self-respect and dignity of manhood, had finished by transforming me, or, at least, had broken all the ties that habit, much more than affection, had till then created between us. I was all ready to free myself, but I did not know how to do it, being still very young and inexperienced.

"I only knew one thing positively: I was decided not to put on again the yoke which inspired me with such a profound horror, ever since the first moment in which I had worn it.

"One night, I could not sleep—ruminating over a thousand angry and desperate ideas—when I heard a slight tapping at the grating which served me as a window——"

"It was I who had come," tranquilly interrupted Clermont, "at the risk of being shot by the duke, if he had surprised me, for he was perfectly capable of killing me like a dog or a thief, in case he had discovered me, at such an hour, within the precincts of his estate! I was the man 'who had *lost* his son', as he called it, and I was not at all ignorant that in his eyes this would have been a sufficient excuse for the greatest violence."

"Was there, then, no watch-dog, to give the alarm or make known your presence?" asked Cuchillo.

"Yes, indeed, my good fellow; but during the six months I had lived in the house, they had learned to know me; and I had, besides, taken care to get into their good graces. One never knows what may happen. Remember this aphorism: once in a house, the first thing necessary to do is to get on good terms with the servants and the dogs, because the former tell tales, and the latter bark. Now you can go on, monsieur le marquis."

"I acknowledge," resumed Paul de Kandos, "that your presence caused me one of the greatest joys of my life, and that for a long time I was grateful to you for it—although ——"

"Pshaw! no reservations, marquis. I brought you deliverance."

"It would have come any how, sooner or later, and I would have paid less dearly for it!"

"But it would also have been less complete!"

"Perhaps—but I would not be here, to-day, under the present state of circumstances, and my life would doubtless have been—very different."

"Still, did I not bring you a file to cut your bars with, and enable you to escape ——"

"Yes."

"I then explained to you that we had been denounced to your father, who had sought information and had lain in wait for us for three days. I ended by counselling you not to fly with empty hands."

"In my then frame of mind I accepted all your suggestions."

"Heavens! without money, the entire universe is nothing but a vast prison. I did not advise you to steal from the duke. I simply explained to you that *I* hadn't a cent, nor *you* either; that, without hard cash one could get neither bread at the baker's, clothes from the tailor, nor the affection of the little ladies you were commencing to love with such a rage. The duke was rich—very rich. You had, besides, your mother's fortune, which should come to you at your majority. It was you, yourself, who declared, after an hour's conversation, that you were resolved to slightly forestall your account with the future ——"

"Let us say it was I," said the marquis, ironically.

"And justly," pursued Louis Clermont, with an air of simplicity which deceived neither of his companions. They knew him too well for that! "The duke, on the next day, was to receive his rents. On such occasions the money was in his possession for twenty-four hours. This was a habit I had remarked. I am very observing. He would carry it to his banker's the day after receiving it. This was a regular custom with him, as were all the other acts of his life."

"In short, thanks to you, I had all the necessary information. I must say that I did not hesitate. It seemed to me that my father had stolen from me since I was ten years old, by depriving me of every comfort, and that I would only take what was my due in taking what belonged to me. Then, I wished to be revenged. He was avaricious, and I knew that to touch his money would be to strike him in his most sensitive spot. That alone, at the time, would have satisfied all my desires. The thing was then agreed upon be-

tween us. You were to take your departure, prudently, that same morning, for Geneva, in order to create an alibi for yourself and be safe from the first pursuit, should there be any.

"You were to await me there, and together we would go to England, by way of Germany and Belgium. I was not to act till the next night."

There was a momentary pause.

Paul de Kandos appeared to have arrived at a point in his story where it required an effort on his part to enable him to continue.

"At this period of my life," he suddenly resumed, turning toward Cuchillo, "I was still very simple and credulous. I adored Louis Clermont, without appreciating him at his true value. For me he represented the joyous and brilliant side of life, of which my father only represented the lugubrious and disagreeable side. I loved him as one loves dainties when one is a *gourmand*, and I believed that he was devoted to me. You laugh at me. I have laughed sufficiently at it since, but I knew that my companion was poor, and the idea that I would be able to reward *his kindnesses*, by sharing with him the money I was about to steal from my father, silenced what few feeble protestations I had felt in my mind. It is true that these protests, or rather hesitations, proceeded only from the fear of being surprised. If I had had nothing to do but to wish, in order to empty, without danger, the ducal strongbox, it would have been done on the instant."

"We are all like that!" philosophically interrupted Clermont. "The moral is: *the police.* There isn't any other."

"Now, being simple and credulous——"

"And, above all, desirous of feeling papa's coin, which represented so many good things," sneered the old convict——

"I believed all that Louis Clermont told me. He had given me, along with the file, of which I have already spoken, the key of my father's study and the key of the chest in which he kept his money be-

fore carrying it to the banker's, who lived in Besancon."

"I ought to tell you, my good fellow," resumed Clermont, addressing Cuchillo, "that it was all child's-play at the duke's. Thus: this millionaire, avaricious enough to take the skin off his Franche-Comte peasants' backs, had no iron safe; that would have cost too much. He contented himself with a strong, ordinary box, the key of which he at night placed under his pillow. One never saw anything equal to it!" added he, shouting with laughter.

"Then, Louis Clermont told me that he had found these two keys, and I believed it—like a fool!"

"I had taken the impressions, and had made the *debridoirs** myself. I have, of their kind, a lot of little society talents; I received a good education—and I have always done my best to complete it."

"Finally, at night-fall, I sawed one of the bars; the file was an excellent one, and the bars not very strong. At midnight, my heart palpitating, and my brow covered with a cold sweat, acting with a resolution which I myself did not know I possessed, and which revealed itself for the first time; with naked feet I descended the stairs which led to my father's room. I opened the door of his study—situated next to his bed-chamber, and communicating with it—and, in the darkness, I went toward the old chest, which I knew so well, and felt for the lock. The key worked admirably!"

"Parbleu!" said Clermont, with satisfaction.

"It turned noiselessly, and my eager hands met in the piles of gold and bank-notes. There were about twenty thousand francs; that was the sum he usually had at such times. Like a madman, without hesitating, I filled my pockets, re-closed the chest, and made ready to escape.

"All at once a light pierced the darkness! I found myself face to face with my father!

* Debridoir: thieves' slang for *key*.

"In one hand he held a lighted candle; in the other a revolver, which he slowly directed toward my breast.

"He was paler than a specter; I saw in his eyes that he was going to kill me!"

CHAPTER XI.

A DOUBLE TRANSFORMATION.

"KILL his son!" exclaimed Cuchillo, with a mixture of horror and incredulity.

"You did not know my father, sir; at this period he was perfectly capable of it. Do not forget that he was a gentleman devotee, and a fanatic, which is the same thing, who had always lived an isolated life, far from the current of modern ideas; narrow, stubborn, violent, and honest to excess; infected with pride of name and race; accustomed to command, and to seeing everyone tremble before him, and thoroughly convinced of the absolute rights of parents over children. It was my first revolt. He surprised me, in the night, stealing his money. That was enough to make him lose his head, and arouse in him the most terrible tempest, which was what happened. I understood him, I read my sentence in his distorted features and maniacal looks; I believed myself a dead man. This ought to have terrified me; I don't understand what passed through my mind, but, in place of attempting to escape, or throwing myself at his feet to ask forgiveness and pardon, or trying to touch his feelings, I recovered myself, braved him, and looked him in the face.

"'Wretch!' he said to me, through his closed teeth, in a hissing voice, 'you are going to die! I will not let you dishonor your family, and carry to the galleys, which awaits you, the name of Kandos. Recommend your soul to God!'

"It was this religious scruple which, by preventing

his blowing out my brains at once, saved me. I had a respite; I had time to speak, and I made use of it. I no longer recognized myself; I know not what demon inspired me, but the simple and timid boy, broken down by discipline, and stupefied with a convent and barracks education, had disappeared—forever.

"'That is useless,' said I, in a hollow voice, which was at the same time provoking; 'kill me at once, I would prefer it; yes, I prefer death to the horrible life you have made me lead ever since I came into the world. Ah! how advantageous it is for me to belong to a noble family, and be a millionaire's son! But there is no peasant's nor beggar's son who is not happier and freer than I!'

"My father regarded me with an astonishment which now bordered upon fury.

"The revolver still threatened me, but it was because the hand which held it, like the rest of the duke's body, was as if petrified in its place.

"'Yes,' continued I, with increasing passion, 'you can kill me! You would only be following out the work you have commenced; for it is not *life* to live like I do, thanks to you. Rich, I have only known misery, bad food, worse clothes, and the absence of all pleasures, even the most innocent and inexpensive! I have never had the free disposal of a minute, nor of a cent; I have grown up in your house like a dog fastened in his kennel; humiliated, crushed, and devoured by ennui; trembling before you like a slave or a culprit. I have a hundred times thought of breaking my chain, running away, or killing myself, in order to escape from this prison. Ah! yes, the galleys! It no longer frightens me—it would appear sweet to me, in comparison with my father's house; I would *there* at least have a companion in chains—and *there* I could work in the open air. It would appear, almost, as liberty and pleasure. At all events, those who surrounded me would be neither freer nor happier than myself, while now I envy everyone I see; and when I hear your riches and titles spoken of, I feel as though I were being mocked at. If I am a marquis, the son

of a millionaire, and am going to be one myself, some day, I don't wish to work like a wretch, and be deprived of everything. I wish to live like other rich young people, do nothing, go to Paris, amuse myself —and profit by the advantages of my birth—or not live at all!'

"My father let the hand which held the pistol fall to his side, and placed the candle on a table.

"Something was going on within him which I could not explain to myself. It now seemed to me that there was more grief than fury in his looks.

"Besides, too excited myself, just then, to take much notice of what was passing before me, I felt myself in less immediate danger, and this emboldened me.

"'Yes,' I resumed, 'kill me! kill me! for, I swear it, I will never resume the collar. No! no! never!'

"He fell on a seat near the table.

"He no longer regarded me. His eyes remained fixed, lost in vagueness. He looked *inside of himself*, following out, in his mind, some thought whose nature I could not comprehend.

"'Yes,' I continued, 'if you do not kill me, let me depart. Hold!' said I, all at once, drawing from my pockets the gold and bank-notes which filled them, and placing the whole on the table. 'Hold! here is your money; it is the only thing you love, and consider of any importance! You have sacrificed everything to it, myself, above all! Take it! keep it! I ask nothing but my liberty from you; I will go far away and, if necessary, beg on the highways——'

"'Or steal,' interrupted my father, arising.

"His face, fully exposed, appeared to me, then, to have become at least ten years older. All anger had disappeared from it; it only expressed deep grief and cold contempt, accompanied by despondency.

"I felt I was to be killed!

"'You are right, sir,' he slowly said to me; 'the usual life between us is, henceforth, impossible. When a son speaks to his father as you have spoken to me,

they ought no longer to meet—at least for a long time! I will not kill you; your soul is much too corrupt for death—I haven't the right to kill it, along with you; to send it to heavenly and eternal vengeance.'

"I uttered a sigh of relief, and I then observed that my audacity had principally proceeded from a feeling that I was lost, from a foolish terror; I had simply turned and fought, like an animal driven into a corner.

"'It appears,' resumed my father, with an accent of bitterness and doubt, which I had never heard in him before, 'that I have rendered you very unhappy! Such was not my intention; I believed I was acting in your own interest, and for your own welfare! I do not now think I did wrong, and if it was to do over again, I would do the same. You are a rebellious son, a wicked creature, and already corrupted and marked with the fatal seal of the evil spirit; Cain's blood flows in your veins! It is doubtless a trial which Heaven sends me!'

"He took a couple of turns in the gloomy room, and then stopped again before me.

"'I have done my whole duty. . . . You pretend that I have abused it. I do not so understand it. But I do not wish to discuss it with you. If it is my conduct toward you, and the salutary subjection of filial obedience which has ruined you, we shall find it out. I grant you the liberty which you demand in such a strange and horrible fashion. I will see what you will make of it. My own conviction is that you are a slothful and boastful fellow, and that you will only put off the healthful slavery of paternal authority to assume the shameful one of your passions. It is also my conviction that you are only a miserable wretch, and will become, one day or another, a criminal.'"

Louis Clermont sneeringly laughed.

Paul's voice had become weaker.

The other's sneer had acted as a spur to him. He resumed in a louder and firmer voice:

"My father walked to the table, and said:

"'But I do not wish you to be able to accuse me in regard to the coming portion of your existence. I do not want to make a thief of you. You have commenced it with me. . . . It shall not be my fault if you continue it with others. Take this money.'

"He pointed to the twenty thousand francs scattered on the table.

"At first I was dazzled. Then a spirit of defiance took possession of me. For this generosity I did not thank my father. In short, I felt humiliated by his conduct. . . . My self-respect was wounded. I drew back from the table with a gesture full of disdain.

"'I wish it!' said my father, in a voice of thunder, and with an irresistible accent of authority. 'Obey me, for the last time, or ——'

"I feared lest he had not changed his original intention of shooting; besides, these twenty thousand francs fascinated me. They appeared to me an inexhaustble fortune ——"

"And you obeyed?" asked Louis Clermont.

"Yes. I took the money.

"'Now,' pursued my father, 'all is ended between us. I no longer know you. Depart! If, later on, you become an honest man, perhaps then I shall be the first to say that I was wrong. And it is *I* who will ask *your* pardon,' said he, in a choking voice. 'There is enough money to either lose or save you. We shall see! If you are what I believe you to be; if you become what I foresee you may become, may my curse, the curse of a father, accompany you! Go and rejoin the accomplice who, doubtless, awaits you not far off! Be off!'

"He pointed toward the door with the solemn gesture which was habitual to him on great occasions, and I departed!

"I gained the court-yard, crossed it precipitately, opened the front gate, and found myself on the highway.

"It was two o'clock in the morning.

"'Free and rich!' I exclaimed, intoxicated with

joy; and I hastened over the ground like an escaped young horse."

CHAPTER XII.

COCO.

LOUIS CLERMONT, in spite of his half-ironical interruptions, listened to the whole of this recital with deep attention, and his interest in it seemed all the more inexplicable since, after all, it concerned affairs altogether personal to the marquis, and which Clermont must have known long ago.

True, he had not directly assisted at all of these scenes; but he must, at the time they occurred, have often heard them related, and he had taken too active a part, even when not actually present, for them to be entirely effaced from his memory.

Still, he listened to each word coming from the lips of the marquis, as if he wished to register it upon his memory. A prosecuting attorney, charged with unravelling the threads of a complicated case, could not have entered upon his occupation with more energy.

Every time some characteristic incident was told, Louis Clermont cast a quick glance toward Cuchillo, as if calling his attention; as much as to say:

"Note this well; do not forget!"

Nevertheless, for some minutes his thoughts had been, evidently, divided between the narrative which we have just reported—abridging it as much as possible, and a certain spot on the distant *pampa.*

He had raised himself on his elbow, and steadily gazed straight before him, over the body of the marquis, who, like his companions, was lying on a blanket spread in the shade of the large red wagon, which was the only shelter in the *gauchos'* encampment.

This pre-occupation became so persistent and characteristic that at last the marquis perceived it.

He suddenly became silent.

"What are you looking at?" he uneasily asked, turning to look, in turn, toward that portion of the *pampa* which was behind him.

"I see, over there, some one coming toward us," replied Clermont; and, with his finger, he pointed to a light cloud of dust some distance off.

The three men arose.

"It is a horseman," said Cuchillo; "some *gaucho,* who is after an escaped bull."

Paul de Kandos had become very pale, and showed signs of great terror.

"Are you sure of it?" he murmured; "are there not several of them? It seems to me that they come from the direction of Buenos Ayres."

"No, no, Monsieur le Marquis, certainly not; reassure yourself. In the first place, *they* are only *one;* and, next, it is really a *gaucho,* as Cuchillo said. What a state you are in! If we were on a great European highway, in place of being in the desert, the sight of the first vehicle would give you such a scare that you would get yourself arrested incontinently.—Here is one who would cower before the *butte!*"* he added, leaning toward Cuchillo's ear.

At this reproach, which he felt was merited, Paul slightly blushed, and tried to affect a coolness he was very far from feeling.

Louis Clermont had put his hand over his eyes in order to be better able to distinguish the person who was rapidly approaching the *corral.*

He gave a shout of laughter.

"Well!" said he, "another old comrade. It is Coco, the *Death's Head!*"

"Ah! indeed," exclaimed Cuchillo; "I thought he was in Buenos Ayres. What's he after, here?"

The man who bore the above strange name had stopped a short distance off, and slapped his hands together three times.

"Ting-a-ling-a-ling! ting-a-ling-a-ling!" screamed

* *Butte:* The scaffold.

Clermont, translating into words this peculiar action, by which, in South America, one announces one's arrival. "Wait; I will open the gate!"

And, hastening away from his companions, he went toward the new-comer.

The latter, it must be acknowledged, did not possess a very pleasing appearance. Rather old, he must have been at least fifty-seven, he was remarkable for a vulgar and bestial figure, a false and hard look, a prominent mouth, with thin, close lips, a low forehead, and prominent cheek-bones.

The remainder of his face was hidden by a rough, gray beard, the same color as his closely-cropped hair.

"What the devil are you doing here?" demanded Clermont, as he accosted him.

"I am going to Chivilcoy."

"You said nothing about it this morning, at Buenos Ayres, when I saw you. Have you met with any misfortune, you old rogue?"

"Faith! no," said Coco. "I have become reasonable. Alas! with age, one cools down. Besides, as you well know, I am, at present, on the police force."

"That is no reason," sneered Clermont; "one may be a thief and a thief-taker at the same time, especially here, where, in general, the police combine both functions."

"Possibly; but that is not my case, at present. There has been a wholesale robbery of cattle; the thieves, whom I know, must have fled by way of Chivilcoy, in order to gain the border, and I am going to assure myself of it. There is a beautiful reward, if I catch them."

"They are not *friends*, I suppose?" said Clermont, threateningly.

"Oh! no! What do you take me for? You know well, on the contrary, that I have got you off two or three times. No, no, these are 'natives.'"

"Then, what do you want?"

"I am dying of thirst and fatigue; I saw a *corral*.

and naturally thought that the inmates would give me some *yerba*, and let me rest for an hour or two."

Louis Clermont appeared to hesitate a moment. Evidently this request, for some reason or other, was disagreeable to him, or deranged some project known to himself alone.

"Eh! well?" said Coco, the *Death's Head*, with an air of surprise.

But, in place of directly responding to this interrogation, the ex-master-of-arms resumed, in a lower tone, although his companions were far enough off not to have heard if he had spoken in his usual voice:

"You know that Cuchillo is with me?"

"Certainly! Ah! ah! I forgot! Yes, poor fellow! He cannot be very happy!"

"He knows nothing!"

"What! You have not told him?"

"No, not yet. And I want you to hold your tongue."

"All right!"

"You mustn't say that you come from Buenos Ayres. You will play ignorance. Do you understand me?"

"Perfectly!"

"We have another companion——"

"Yes, yes, I see him," interrupted Coco, inspecting the two men, who were once more stretched out on their blankets, without noticing anything. "Who is he?"

"An old acquaintance of mine; a poor devil, taking a quiet rest for the pleasure of it, and whom we have harbored for several days," replied Clermont, now taking as much care to conceal the real personality of the marquis as he had formerly done to make it known to Cuchillo.

"He has been *au pre?*"*

"No; he fled just in time. For the rest, he is a

* *Au pre:* at the galleys.

little *grinche*,* who has no pluck. Don't speak of anything before him, either."

"Very well!"

"Then, come in!" added Louis Clermont, with an air of forced good-fellowship.

Coco dismounted, took off his horse's saddle and bridle, stretched his legs, and followed Louis Clermont to the place where the marquis and Cuchillo, both silent and plunged in reflection, awaited them.

Cuchillo, since the previous evening, that is to say, since the arrival of the marquis, and above all since his companion's return from Buenos Ayres, could understand none of Louis Clermont's proceedings.

His mysterious allusions, his reticences, the brightness of his glances, and the strange nervousness of his lips, on which were constant ironical sneers, showing a double row of white and pointed teeth, like those belonging to the feline race; all this announced some secret idea, an, as yet, unknown project, or some approaching event, which Cuchillo was vainly trying to foresee or guess.

So far his conjectures had been futile; but he felt uneasy, knowing his old companion too well not to understand that he was arranging something serious, in which his own part was all marked out in advance.

"Why the devil has he made this marquis, whom I didn't know, relate to me in detail the whole of his existence?" he said to himself. "It might perhaps make an interesting romance; but, after all, what matters it to me? It concerns me in no way. And then, besides, Clermont must know all this by heart, since he had a part in it. . . . And yet he seems beyond measure interested. . . . What is the old wretch ruminating over, and what has he in view? It is certainly not interest and affection which dictates his conduct. He takes no interest in anyone, and he often throws strange looks upon his old companion, which, if they were directed toward me would make me afraid ——"

At bottom Cuchillo felt a certain sympathy for the

* *Grinche:* a thief.

marquis, whose nature was at once weak and violent. The slave of his passions, proud, spoiled by his position, easily influenced to evil, accomplishing it without being coolly cynical, as his constant terror sufficiently proved, he responded, in more than one way, to his auditor's nature.

The abandoned child who had become a convict, evidently recognized in the marquis who had become a criminal, many sentiments of anger and revolt which he would have himself felt if he had been brought up under the same conditions. And this similarity of temperament made him kindly disposed toward Paul de Kandos, to whom he felt inclined to accord that half-savage friendship, wholly unthinking, of which men of his kind are capable.

His reflections were broken by the arrival of Clermont and Coco, the *Death's Head;* and this arrival turned aside his thoughts, bringing them back to the present, and recalling the fact that the ex-master-of-arms, on his return from Buenos Ayres, had refused to answer his questions in regard to the *marquesa.*

"A friend!" said Louis Clermont, presenting the new-comer to the marquis. "He has come to ask us for *yerba* and permission to take a rest."

Paul bowed slightly, without making any reply, while inspecting the new friend presented to him with an air of defiance and uneasiness, of which he could not disembarrass himself, and which increased when he observed the attention with which *Coco* watched him.

Neither did this attention escape Louis Clermont, who appeared annoyed at it, although he tried to conceal his annoyance.

"Welcome," said Cuchillo, extending his hand to the new guest. "You seem overcome by the heat. *Yerba* and an hour's rest will put you all right. What news do you bring? How goes Mariquita?" he whispered, in a low tone, in the other's ear.

"Faith, I don't know. It is some time since I saw her, or even heard her spoken of."

"How is that?" said Cuchillo, surprised and speaking aloud. "Don't you come from Buenos Ayres?"

"No. For the last fortnight I have been in a *corral* east of here, and have come directly from it, to go to Chivilcoy, where business awaits me."

"Ah!" sighed Cuchillo, with an air of dejection.

Paul de Kandos, on hearing that Coco did not come from Buenos Ayres, gave a sigh of relief, and appeared more at his ease.

All four of the men partook of *yerba* while conversing of things of little importance; then Coco, the *Death's Head*, at the end of an hour, arose, declaring that he had not a moment to lose if he wished to arrive at Chivilcoy before night.

Louis Clermont helped him to put on his horse's saddle and bridle. The animal had also had a good rest.

"What were you staring so for at the good fellow who is with us?" he suddenly asked when the traveler was about to depart.

"Why, at his strange resemblance ——"

"To whom?"

"To Cuchillo!"

"Ah! you find one?" asked Clermont, with an air of surprise. "Faith, it had not struck me."

"Nevertheless, it is startling."

"I don't see it! It is owing to the dress, doubtless. I don't say but that there is a slight one—but it would be impossible to confound them together."

"The same eyes, the same nose, the same mouth—"

"Pshaw! you exaggerate; and if you cannot distinguish better the difference between people, you will make a sorry policeman. A good journey!"

"What the devil brought him?" grumbled Clermont, when the other had left. "What need had he to come—and to see what did not concern him?"

And, gloomy, irritated, and nervous, he returned to his companions.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN WHICH CUCHILLO PERCEIVES THAT THE HISTORY OF THE MARQUIS CONCERNS HIM MORE NEARLY THAN HE COULD HAVE BELIEVED.

"SO, then," exclaimed Louis Clermont, suddenly, and even somewhat brutally, resuming the conversation interrupted by Coco's arrival, and addressing the marquis, "there you were free and rich, your own master and twenty thousand francs in your pocket. You may skip the events which followed. I know them by heart, having passed two years in your company, sticking to you like your shadow.

"Wine, play and women cleaned you out nicely. England, Germany and Italy—every place where roulette was played, successively saw us. In the beginning you had most wonderful luck—a beginner's luck. But it did not last. Fate turned against us. It was necessary to correct this, and I charged myself with the task, without saying anything to you about it; for you were always scrupulous about certain things, which was in singular contrast with your lack of scruples in regard to others. That never leads to any good—do you see? One must be all or nothing—either squarely deride, in everything, everywhere, and always, the nonsense of honest people, or resolutely respect it.

"When one is, like you, wavering—neither honest nor dishonest—floating at will between his passions and his prejudices, there comes a day when one becomes a criminal. One may be famished and conscience-stricken with terror in the *pampa*, when one ought to be shining at Paris, with a title and riches!"

"It well becomes you to preach morality to me,"

replied de Kandos, with irritation. "You have no prejudices—you, whom I know; and not being all *the one*, as you say, you have been entirely the *other!* I do not see that it has advanced you to anything great. For if you meet me, once more, on the *pampa*, famished and in hiding, you are in the same condition. You have also been rich, and, if you are not a noble and a marquis, like myself, you none the less belong by birth to the best society."

"I have not said my last word," sneered Louis Clermont; "and I have a vague idea that I will end better than you."

"We shall see."

"Oh! yes, certainly! At last we had to separate."

"Which means that one fine morning you left me without notice, or telling me where you were going!"

"My dear disciple, that tore my heart; but it had to be done. I had committed an unpardonable crime, with which I reproached myself bitterly!"

"Phew!" said Cuchillo, astonished, "did you feel remorse for once in your life?"

"Yes, my son, and it was cruel."

"What had you done, then?"

"I let myself be caught like a fool, at the moment when, in playing *lansquenet*, I introduced a pack of cards previously marked. I was going to have a superb hand, win everything—and——"

"Well; I understand."

"I had to cut stick."

"And I was left alone, almost without a cent, in a very bad plight, compromised and suspected, on account of my relations with you," continued the marquis. "We were at Monaco, as you will remember; I left there a few days after you did, and went to Paris, where I lived, at first, with a swarm of blue devils. But I was twenty years old, then; I was nearing the time when my mother's fortune would become mine. I found out how to borrow, and I lived,

rather better than worse, by mortgaging the future to filthy usurers."

"I see that from here."

"In brief, the hour of my majority arrived. My father handed in his accounts——"

"Did you see him again?"

"No; my conduct had not been such as to obtain his pardon. His house had been, and remained, a forbidden spot to me, as also his presence."

"Then it is more than twenty years since he has seen you?" insisted Louis Clermont.

"Alas! yes."

"And since you have been in that country?"

"Yes."

Louis Clermont slowly rubbed his hands.

"Continue, my dear friend," he added, in sugared tones.

"I found myself, then, with a capital of five hundred thousand francs."

"*Peste!* That is a pretty sum!" said Clermont, licking his lips.

"It was enough to have assured my happiness and tranquility, had I not been a fool. I could have made a brilliant marriage, and got back into the duke's good graces. I had, for a time, the desire to do this; but I have never known how to resist the impressions and caprices of the moment. I launched out into luxury, and foolishly ate up this fortune with the companions of my idleness; in three years everything was gone, except ten thousand francs. It was an actress, Celine Z., well known in the world of play-goers——"

"Yes, I have heard the name," interrupted Clermont.

"Who brought my odyssey to an end."

"How was that?"

"First, she took me in——"

"And then?"

"She showed me the door!" Paul clasped his hands, and cried: "Ah! I could have killed her! Actresses have always proven my evil genii! In the end, for

once, I controlled myself, and, afraid of committing some still greater foolishness, I left Paris and went to Auvers."

"To Auvers! What to do?"

"You had once spoken to me of South America, and had said that it was the country of abundance, where one could make a fortune, provided he had energy and something to begin on; I still had ten thousand francs, and wished to start for *La Plata*, and commence life over again. At that moment I was full of courage and good resolutions. The silliness and emptiness of my existence cut me to the heart; I felt that it would have ended in shame, perhaps in crime—" he shuddered; "I wished to remount the ladder I had for years been descending, the last rungs of which were sunk in infamy."

"It is true," tranquilly interrupted the ex-convict, "that I came, when very young, to this country. At nineteen, my father, a strict but just man, auguring badly from my disposition, and furious at some of my peccadilloes, sent me to sea. On arriving at Buenos Ayres, I deserted without any hesitation, and became, even then, a *gaucho*. While guarding the horses I ruined a charming young girl, an adorable *china*. I never told you of that!"

"What has become of her? You have never spoken to me about it," said Cuchillo.

"What became of her, my good fellow? Why, she became a mother!" laughed Clermont. "Add to this that she was as jealous as a tigress; that she pretended that I had robbed her of her honor; that she wished me to marry her, for her sake and that of the child. It was very droll. I left the *pampa*, where I was roasting, and the *china*, who annoyed me with her tears, and returned to Europe by way of Brazil."

"And, since your return to this country, have you made no inquiries, either in regard to her or your child?"

"Never, my gentle shepherd, never! The mother has grown old, if she still lives; as to the child, I am ignorant of its sex or name. Besides, morality pre-

vented me from occupying myself about it," continued the old convict, sneeringly. "I have a legitimate wife and child; I owe duties to them!"

Cuchillo turned away in disgust, and said in a tone of marked sympathy:

"Continue your history, marquis."

"I arrived, then, at Auvers, with my ten thousand francs, and the best of resolutions. Unfortunately, I was unable to embark immediately; I must wait fifteen days. They decided my life. Ah! why did I put my feet in that cursed city?"

He passed his hand over his forehead; but, feeling the mocking regard of his ex-professor in vice upon him, he struggled against his feelings, and hastily resumed:

"I did not know how to employ these fifteen days, so I did like all strangers do in such cases—in a city where they are unknown—I lounged about; and it was while thus employed, that, one fine day, I read a huge placard announcing for the next day an exhibition by:

THE DAUGHTER OF THE PAMPAS,

who would cross, blindfolded, the famous place de Meer, on a tight-rope stretched from the roofs of the houses on either side.

"I ought to tell you that it was carnival time, just then, and there were a number of mountebank sideshows, which I had not entered. The next day was Sunday, a tedious day in all countries. 'This will help me to pass away an hour,' I thought.

"In fact, I was there on the next day, in company with ten thousand idlers. A rope had been stretched across one corner of the *place*. It was at least sixty feet from the ground, and was about the same distance in length. Almost immediately I heard the most infernal music announcing the arrival of the procession. The latter filed into the square, to the right of where I stood, and I could see the whole of it. At the head were a dozen musicians dressed like Hussars, and blowing, as if they were deaf, their brass instruments

to the obliging accompaniment of cymbals and bass-drum.

"Behind the musicians came a colossal elephant, and, perched on the back of the animal, sheltered by a dais of garnet velvet, discolored and soiled by the sun and rain of all the cities of two worlds, was a young girl——

"She might have been fourteen or fifteen years old, and was of a strange and admirable type; I cannot describe it to you—you know it—the South American creole. Black eyes, with burning glances, and shaped like the almond; eyes which seem to turn one's head; a creamy skin; coral lips; pearl-like teeth; a profusion of soft, shining hair; and hands and feet extraordinarily small and finely formed!

"Her costume was rich and becoming: a sleeveless vest of emerald green velvet, out of which came her bare, plump arms; a white muslin skirt, coming to the knee; and rose-colored silk stockings. A crimson sash of Chinese crape set off her figure, and one could have easily spanned her waist with one's hands, while her heaving bosom, already well formed, was partially exposed, owing to the low-necked corsage she wore. Add to this a necklace and bracelets of glass beads, and a velvet cap, crimson, like her sash, ornamented with a gold band, on her small and beautifully-poised head, and you will understand the admiration which took possession of me at the first glance.

"At the elephant's sides rode four persons in the dress of *gauchos*, which costume I had never before seen.

"Next I perceived a carriage in which, nonchalantly lying back in their seats, were a man and woman, dressed in ordinary attire; with a hard and vulgar air. These were, doubtless, the girl's parents; at all events, the proprietors of the exhibition.

"Arrived at the *place*, the young girl, leaning on the arm of one of the men dressed as *gauchos*, leaped lightly to the earth; one would have said a bird had alighted. She was ravishing, and I was no longer able to withdraw my gaze from her. She saluted the crowd,

throwing them kisses with the affected grace peculiar to her class; her glance, which took in the whole place, met mine! It was dazzling, and I almost closed my eyes; when I reopened them, she was climbing, swiftly and resolutely, the long rope-ladder which led to one of the wooden platforms from which was stretched the thread on which she was about to risk her life. When I saw her at that hight, about to launch herself into space, I felt a cold sweat. If she should fall! It would be death; a certain, horrible death!

"They first gave her two tri-colored flags, and, seizing one in each hand, she started off. She rapidly crossed the rope, turned round, and came back to her starting-point.

"I believe that while this was going on, my heart had stopped beating; the crowd foolishly applauded. I desired to escape—it made me ill. I could not; it was as if my feet were riveted to the earth.

"The man who had followed in the carriage had mounted to her side, on the small platform placed for that purpose. He passed over her head a gray linen hood, which he carefully fastened around her neck, and then gave her a long and heavy balancing pole. The musicians then commenced a slow and funereal air, and the unhappy one advanced into space and darkness. Now, every breath was held—one could have heard a fly move. It was frightful!

"Two of the *gauchos*, far below, followed her, ready to catch her, if she fell—a ridiculous precaution imposed by the police. She crossed the first time, without accident; I was bathed in a cold perspiration.

"Ah! I would have given ten years of my life if that had been the end of it; yet I could not withdraw my eyes from this frightful and enchanting spectacle. It was now time to re-cross. She turned, and resumed her route. But, when she arrived exactly at the middle of her trip, she stopped, hesitated, staggered! The balance-pole oscillated, ready to draw her into space; it went up and down from right to left; it

seemed to me that this lasted a century. By a supreme effort, she violently recovered herself, and, running straight ahead, in place of walking, as she had done just before, finally gained the platform. It was barely in time! She let fall her heavy balance-pole, and tremblingly clung to the rail she had seized with her hands. She was frightened; she had felt death; she almost fainted. The chief of the *troupe*, who was near her, took off her hood, and her pretty, pale face appeared in the sunlight. This sufficed to restore her; she soon smiled—her profession required it—and, descending to the *place*, she threw kisses to the crowd, who hailed her with cheers. This over, she seized a wooden bowl and passed it around among the throng. When she reached me, she paused; she smiled and shook her bowl twice. I plunged my hand into my pocket, and threw her all the louis it contained.

"'*Mil gracias, senor!*' said she, darting at me a piercing glance, and then pursuing her quest.

"I saw nothing more. An hour later I was still there, stupidly looking at the workmen who were taking away the poles on which had stood the platform, and unfastening the rope."

"You were indeed caught," said Clermont. "It is curious; I have often frolicked with pretty girls, but they have never yet been able to make me lose my wits."

"When this work was over I followed the men, and arrived at a shed bearing this sign:

'THE DAUGHTER OF THE PAMPAS.'

"She must be there! It was not the hour for a performance; nevertheless, I mounted the steps and raised the cloth curtain, for there was no one near the entrance, and I found myself in the interior. Directly opposite me was an immense cage with iron bars; in the cage was a crouching lioness, and, alone, playing with it, her brown head between the ferocious creature's paws, was she who was called *The Daughter of the Pampas.*

"She had taken off her dancing costume, and had simply placed over her underclothing a short, white tunic, fastened at the waist, and without sleeves. Her rumpled hair strayed at will over her beautiful shoulders.

"I stood there, astonished, charmed, and frightened.

"She soon perceived me, arose on one knee, and, with her slender hands throwing back her ebony locks, she smiled at me with all her white pearls showing, saying, in a contralto voice, as if she expected me:

"'Ah! here he is!'

"'Mademoiselle!' I murmured.

"'Call me Mariquita!' said she, laughingly."

"*Mariquita!*" repeated Cuchillo, with a distracted air, and as pale as a corpse.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DAUGHTER OF THE PAMPAS BECOMES A MARCHIONESS.

IN this cry of surprise there was anger and menace; in other words, jealousy. It was the cry of a lover, not of a simple auditor. Paul de Kandos had a suspicion of the truth, for, becoming upright, he answered with a wicked look:

"You know her, then?"

"*Carajo!*" quickly said Louis Clermont, without giving Cuchillo time to answer, and closing his mouth by a rapid glance full of command, and recommending prudence. "Does he know her? I should think so; and I also, and *Coco, the Death's Head*, and all the *gauchos* of the *pampa*, and all the inhabitants, male and female, of Buenos Ayres! Who does not know Mariquita, called the *Marquisa?* The *prima donna* of the theater, the woman of fashion, the public's idol ——"

"Ah! I understand!" murmured the marquis, in a calmer tone, but with an accent of deep bitterness.

"And, with all that," pursued Clermont, "a good girl. Not at all arrogant; preferring the noisy pleasures of the *gauchos* to the feasts offered her by the rich young city fellows; forgetting the champagne supper, which awaits her in a palace, to come to the *fonda*, in the dress of a *portena*, and drink the common Catalonian wine with her poor friends, and dance, at the sound of the accordeon, a habanero."*

"She is a *gaucho's* daughter," replied the marquis, in a trembling voice; "she has never forgotten it. *What is bred in the bone will come out in the flesh!*"

At these words Cuchillo made a furious gesture, and seemed ready to resent them as being injurious to the class to which he belonged for the moment; but Clermont, who had not taken his eyes off him, forcibly seized his arm and whispered:

"Hold your tongue, if you wish to know what has happened to Mariquita; for he alone can tell it. Afterward you will be free to act!"

The old convict's tone was so expressive—his glance so full of advice—that Cuchillo, bowing his head, understood that it was something serious—something which directly concerned himself, and he silently resolved to hear the whole, to the end.

But now he was changed. All sympathy for Paul de Kandos had gone from his heart. The other was a rival—a rival, happier than himself, whom he envied and hated. This man had known the *marquesa*, at the dawn of her beauty, and had been able to throw her gold pieces, while he, a poor, miserable *gaucho*, under the ban of law and society, had never known this joy of making a present to, or of procuring the enjoyments of luxury and vanity for, her whom he loved and who stooped to him.

With closed lips and frowning brow he now listened with a rage for knowledge, and also with a secret de-

* A peculiar national dance, originating in Havana.

sire to find a pretext for a quarrel which would allow the escape of the tempest roaring in the depths of his heart.

The marquis, on his side, seemed absorbed in some deep and sorrowful mental pre-occupation to such an extent that he saw none of the by-play we have described.

"Go on, my dear marquis; continue, I pray you," suddenly said Clermont, in a soft voice. "You have stopped at a most interesting moment."

Paul de Kandos gave a start, as if coming out of some far off dream. He appeared to try and remember where he had left off, and then resumed his narrative, as follows:

"'Eh! well, Mariquita,' I said to her, 'do me the kindness to come out of that cage, where I dread seeing you at the mercy of that ferocious beast.'

"'What childishness!' replied she. 'Paquita is my best friend—my only one.'

"She gave the animal a slight tap on its ears, and disappeared, for a moment, through a door at one end of the cage, and then came running to me as if we were old friends.

"'How can your parents expose you to such dangers?' exclaimed I, seizing her hands, which she made no effort to withdraw. 'It is abominable!'

"'My parents!—I have none.'

"'They were not, then, your father and mother who followed you in a carriage a short time since, when you risked your life?'

"'My mother died a short time after my birth, and my father, a *gaucho* on the pampa near Buenos Ayres, was killed by a savage bull about ten years ago. I was an orphan at four. It was then that Mister John Redfield and his wife, North Americans, discovered I was pretty, and received, or rather stole me, in order to dress and exhibit me in their show. In addition to that, as you see, they have a kind of menagerie. They beat me whenever they pleased, during my childhood. Now, that I am making their fortune, they treat me more kindly; but they pay me nothing. Happily,' she

added, 'I have been able to save one of the gold coins you threw into my bowl. Here it is!'

"What have I told you? I was an amorous fool. She was a savage, but not shy. I forgot all my serious resolutions. I forgot America—and that I was ruined. . . . I carried her off, and took her to Paris, where, in three months, my ten thousand francs went in toilettes for her and in pleasures which she had never before known, but which she took to with unusual gusto!"

Paul sighed and shrugged his shoulders. There were both regret and rage depicted on his features, which became gradually darker as his recital advanced.

Cuchillo had concealed *his* face in his hands, to prevent his sensations being discovered.

Louis Clermont, alone, was perfectly calm, and coolly studied, with a strange smile on his lips, what was passing in the hearts of the two others.

"She was charming," pursued the marquis. "She had completely bewitched me. She wanted me to marry her.

"'I would be a marchioness,' said she. 'Wouldn't it be droll? The daughter of the *Pampas* a marchioness!—'

"She threatened to leave me if I did not marry her. I was at the end of my resources. I argued to myself that she loved me, for at times she was irresistibly delightful. At that time I was twenty-four and a-half years old. In order to support her, I decided to get employment. I would never have believed myself capable of it. Thanks to my father's name, I was well received. I got work in the bureau of the Minister of Finance, where I received three thousand francs. This was misery to me—but it was bread—and it gave me a little credit. I wrote to my father, asking his consent. He very naturally refused it. Mademoiselle Mariquita Antequerra, ex-tight-rope-dancer, an orphan and penniless, could not be very agreeable to him as a daughter-in-law. I waited till I was twenty-five. I formally asked his consent to my marriage—and married her!"

Cuchillo raised his head.

"Then you are her husband?" he said, slowly.

"Wait a minute!" exclaimed Clermont. "She has never spoken of this marriage, nor assumed her title of marchioness; although she has been nicknamed the *marquesa*, without our knowing why. We were ignorant of all this!"

"It is because she no longer cared for the title, after her momentary caprice was satisfied, and she saw that it would profit her nothing."

"And where were you married?" asked Louis Clermont.

"At Paris, in the Eleventh Ward."

"In what year?"

"The 17th of May, 1850."

"Ah! very good," said the ex-master-of-arms, like a man who engraves a thing in his memory. "Continue—it becomes very interesting. Doesn't it, Cuchillo?"

The latter made no reply. He had resumed his former position, and his face could not be seen.

"Once married, she was altogether changed. She had believed that my father would come round, and that he would send us some money. He sent nothing, and at the end of a few months, she was about to become a mother. I was such a fool over this ridiculous passion—that I have been unable to pluck it from my heart," he added, almost to himself. "I did not notice even that which should have placed me on the alert. Thus, though I only earned three thousand francs a year, poverty disappeared from our house, and Mariquita had superb toilettes and jewels.

"'I get all these on credit,' she said; and I believed her, or, rather, no. Stay, I will be frank; I was cowardly, I pretended to believe. I threw myself on my knees; *I* was the one to ask pardon. I suspected that one of the witnesses of our marriage, Octave de Nerbault, a rich young man, was her lover. She had pitied me enough to tell me that it was not true, which permitted me to appear ignorant of it. He called himself my

friend; I execrated him—and I flattered him—because it pleased her.

"Oh! well, it is base, what I am going to tell you, but only he who has never loved would misunderstand me. One day, just after a violent scene, she declared that all was ended between us. I believed I would die; I begged her to remain. Shrugging her shoulders, she refused.

"Then do you know what I did? I went after Octave; that fool, that wretch! I told him that I would kill myself if she left me; I pretended to believe in the purity of his friendship for the marchioness, and he promised me that he would use his influence to persuade her to renounce this project of an angry woman.

"That evening, when I returned home, she was there, and received me as tranquilly as if nothing had passed!"

"Eh! but it seems that this Octave was a good fellow," sneered Clermont.

"Soon after she gave birth to a child, whom I named Annette. I hoped that maternity would change my wife, make her more reasonable, and bring back her affection for me. In fact, for three months she appeared kinder and more even-tempered, although she did not appear to care very much for her little daughter, whom she did not wish to nurse.

"One fine day——"

The marquis's words seemed to stick in his throat.

"Drink a little *caña*," said the ex-master-of-arms.

Paul seized the gourd and swallowed several mouthfuls.

"One fine day, or, rather, evening, on returning home, I found the cage empty—the bird had flown, with Octave. My little Annette was asleep in her cradle; a note was fastened with a pin to the bedclothes. I have always kept it, here it is!"

The marquis drew a pocketbook from his pocket, opened it, took out a leaf of yellow paper, and, trembling with anger, read as follows:

"'My Dear Paul:

"'All is ended. You cannot believe how wearisome it is to be loved, when one does not love in return; we were not made for each other. The gold you one day threw into my bowl, at Anvers, dazzled me. Besides, I was tired of the trade Master John had made me learn, in order to enrich himself. He had beaten me, and I wished to revenge myself in ruining him by my flight. You presented yourself; I followed you. Then, I wished to be a marchioness, but as that brings me nothing, I prefer to change my role. I am assured that I have a beautiful voice; I am not yet too ugly, nor too old.

"'Household life is not my forte; I am going into a theatrical life. You will probably weep much on reading this letter; you will be wrong; you have already wept too much before me. Believe me, in the interest of you future loves: *it is better to make a woman afraid, than to inundate her with your tears!*

"'If you had rained blows upon me, if you had killed Octave, I would have, perhaps, adored you. I will never love anyone unless he masters and overcomes me. Be easy: I do not love Octave either; I have never yet loved anything but *Paquita*, the big lioness which frightened you; but, if you *are* the marquis, it is Octave who has the money—and toilettes are a necessity to me. I leave you Annette; I would be a bad mother, and set her a villainous example. Console yourself. In losing me you do not lose very much, and you will always possess the advantage of having been *my first* lover.

"'MARIQUITA.'"

CHAPTER XV.

THE HUSBAND MEETS HIS WIFE AGAIN.

"BRAVO!" said Louis Clermont. "Here is a superior woman! Just the sort for me! I would not have wept—aud I would not have killed Octave; we would have perfectly understood each other! In place of this, Providence has afflicted me with, perhaps, the only honest woman that there was in Europe or America. In this way I was overweighted, and you see what it has reduced me to. Ah! monsieur le marquis," he continued in his mocking tones, "how few successful men there are! You are cursed by the author of your being; driven away from the paternal mansion; you have led a merry life, and have ended this beautiful existence by a murder, followed by arson, an aggravating circumstance! Eh! well, in spite of all this, you are still full of prejudices. Like my friend, Cuchillo, capable of anything, at a given moment, and then, afterwards, be off!—with remorse, regrets, and aspirations—it is enough to kill one with laughter!"

Paul de Kandos folded up the letter he had just read, and replaced it in his pocketbook, without appearing to hear what his former companion said.

"This was a terrible blow!" he resumed, in a voice full of anger; "if she had been present, I believe I could have killed her, but after a few moments I became more reasonable; I understood that everything was, indeed, ended, as she had said in her letter, each word of which had tortured me, and cut me to the heart. Meanwhile, I had a desire to run after her, bring her back by force—anything. But I conquered

myself. So long as she had lied to me, in deceiving me; so long as she had condescended to deny—I could pretend to believe her, in spite of all evidence. Now she acknowledged all; a remnant of pride held me back. At this moment I could have been saved, and could have returned to a regular life, if my father had held out to me a helping hand. I was deeply discouraged and disgusted at the foolish and unwholesome life I had been leading. If my father had opened his arms to me, I would have returned to the fold—and what has since happened—would never have happened!"

He paused, his face pale and covered with sweat, as he remembered the terrible deeds he had committed, and which Louis Clermont had revealed, without giving the details.

Cuchillo stirred not. He listened in a state of complete immobility, which somewhat annoyed Clermont.

The latter was, in fact, trying to make out what was passing in his companion's thoughts, and frequently questioned him with a glance; but their eyes never met, and the old convict's curiosity remained unsatisfied.

"Wait!" he even once grumbled between his teeth. "You will wake up presently, I assure you!"

"For a week," finally resumed the marquis, "I remained completely overcome, not knowing what to do, and incapable of any resolution whatsoever. I was ruined, as you know, and I was not the man to content myself with the poor position I had applied for and obtained while living with Mariquita. Moreover, I now had a child, a little girl, whose presence, in place of consoling me, was insupportable to me, constantly recalling to me the treachery of her mother.

"I at last wrote to my father, trying to get back into his favor, and asking his pardon. I acknowledged my faults. I told him how my wife had abandoned me; I endeavored to interest him in the welfare of the child; I begged him to receive me, and Annette, into his house, swearing to actively occupy myself in the cultivation of our land; offering to be his associate,

his steward, or whatever he wished. This is his answer to me. I know the letter by heart:

"'MONSIEUR:—I gave you your liberty. You know what you have done with it. You have eaten up, in disgusting orgies, your mother's fortune, which the law forced me to hand over to you. Since then, to crown the unworthiness of your conduct, you have continued to ignore paternal authority. You married, in opposition to my wishes, a girl of the streets. It is your own doing. Who sows the wind gathers the whirlwind. You are, now, wretched and baffled, and wish to cling to me as the drowning man does to the branch he meets. Perhaps your repentance is sincere—perhaps it is not. I do not need to trouble myself about it. God punishes rebellious sons, and you are justly punished.

"'Nevertheless, if you were not married, I would perhaps have consented to re-open to you, not my arms, but my house. Unfortunately you *are* married, that is to say, united for life, by an indissoluble tie, to a creature whom I will never consent to recognize as my daughter-in-law. This woman separates us forever. The Duke of Kandos could have pardoned the follies and indiscretions of the Marquis of Kandos, in the hope that his experiences, acquired at his own expense, would serve as a lesson to him. He will never receive into his house Mariquita's husband. Your name is no longer yours alone; it also belongs to this girl, who can do with it whatever she pleases. No joint responsibility is therefore possible between us, henceforth.

"'As to your child, that is another thing. After having maturely reflected upon it, I am disposed to take her with me, and bring her up far from the mire in which she would be reared if she remained near you or her mother. I therefore consent to receive her, to save her soul, to teach her to respect holy things, to instill ideas of virtue and honor, which she would never be able to acquire from her natural protectors. Only, from the day she crosses the threshold of my house,

you will never see her again, and she shall have no intercourse whatever with you.

"'This is all I can do for you, and these are my conditions.

"'ARMAND, *duke of* KANDOS.'

"I knew my father too well to insist. After some little hesitation, I sent the child to him. She would have always been at least an embarrassment; and I now found myself a penniless marquis; a husband, without a wife; a father, without a child; alone, and reduced to living on my wits."

"And you have never seen your child again?" quickly asked Clermont.

"No!"

"Then, she does not know you?"

"No more than I do her."

"She is large girl, by this time ——"

"She is a little over fourteen years old. It is about fifteen years since I married."

"What did you do, then?"

"I have led a miserable existence, practising all trades, running after fortune and happiness, without success; sometimes in France, again in Germany, and in Italy. All that would prove very uninteresting to you."

"On the contrary, my dear pupil, it would interest me very much. You cannot understand what pleasure I take in all your adventures, and how your recital rejoices me. No—no; tell it all. Don't deprive us of the details; the more there are the better we shall like it. Do not be afraid of abusing our patience!"

Clermont was evidently sincere. He plainly wished to know the daily life of the marquis. . . . To what end? We shall soon know.

Paul de Kandos, for his part, was in one of those dispositions of mind in which one experiences a sort of thinking aloud and of confessing to somebody. The sympathy which he believed he had found in his auditors, although they were not men whose opinion or approval could prove very flattering, gave him pleas-

ure. He felt that he had fallen to such depth that nothing was any longer too low for him; and the poignant horror of the last deeds he had committed, and which had terminated his long descent in such a terrible fashion, made him wish to postpone speaking of them as long as possible. He recoiled before the actual denouement of his life. He therefore let himself be drawn on to tell all. He related minutely the events of the past years, down to the day when, taking his old idea, he positively decided to sail for South America.

We will pass over in silence all that portion of his recital which would lack interest for our readers, although of great importance, as could be seen, to his two auditors, and will take up the narrative of the marquis at the moment of his arrival at la Plata.

"I landed at la Plata," he said, "eight months since, provided with a grant of land—you know the sort. You receive acres of naked ground, waterless, on the frontier, and near the Indians. One thinks he possesses something, and it turns out nothing. I associated with me two peasants, believing in the reality and value of these grants. We were directed to the province of Corrientes. Despite the frightful deception I found myself the victim of, on seeing the miles of dust which formed my property I went courageously to work. This was as foolish as useless on my part. Of the two peasants whom I had brought with me, one died of cholera at the end of six months, and the other was surprised and killed by the Indians, who burnt the poor hut we had painfully constructed, stole our animals, and tore up the few meagre plants that we had succeeded in making grow.

"This was too much! I left my grant, which they will often give over again to poor European simpletons, and, having no money with which to quit this cursed country, I turned *gaucho*. It is a hard life; but one gets something to eat, and, here there is no other choice.

"I passed from the service of one master to that of another, when, four days ago, I entered the province

of Buenos Ayres, and wished to visit the city of the same name, which I was unacquainted with, never having been there.

"It was my Fate which brought me there!

"Twenty-four hours had not elapsed, when, on going to the theater, I recognized in the principal singer, Mariquita, my wife, all trace of whom I had lost for many long years."

"Ah! ah! we are *there* at last!" cried Clermont, almost joyously. "Listen, Cuchillo, listen! I assure you that this will interest you!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CARNIVAL AT BUENOS AYRES.

CUCHILLO, in fact, had raised his head on again hearing the *marquisa's* name pronounced.

His eyes, which shone with a strange light, fixed themselves on the marquis, while a slight trembling agitated his parched lips; but Paul de Kandos was too absorbed with his own feelings to trouble himself about another's.

Louis Clermont himself had brutally laid aside his expression of raillery, and appeared somewhat agitated, although he no longer regarded the speaker; his attention was now confined to his ex-galley companion.

"Yes," resumed the marquis, in a panting voice, "I saw her in all the brilliancy of her beauty, which time had not at all impaired. Her first youth was past, but the woman possessed all that the young girl promised to attain.

"Besides, she had evidently assumed a new role; it was no longer the untamed little savage I had known: This was a woman of the world, with elegant and distinguished manners, full of that *morbidezza*, as the Italians call it, which gives such terrible fascination to some privileged creatures.

"The shock was a great one to me.

"I had not read the programme before entering the theater, where I had been taken by two companions with whom I had passed the morning in enjoying the carnival; I was slightly intoxicated. The sight of her sobered me. They played *La Favorite.* When she entered, in her superb costume, as the well-beloved mistress of a king, there was through the house a thunder of applause, bravos, and enthusiastic cries; they covered her with flowers. Smiling and assured, she thanked them, and bowed with a grace all her own, which recalled to me the day when I had first seen her, on the *place de Meer*, at Anvers, distributing her kisses to the crowd, already enchanted with her grace and beauty.

"The public occupying the cheaper seats particularly and furiously applauded. The *gauchos*, scattered over the hall, arose, waving their hats; many brandished their knives or their revolvers, as if they were saluting some military chieftain.

"'She belongs to the country,' proudly said one of my companions to me. 'She is the daughter of one of *us*, a plain *gaucho:* it is Mariquita Antequerra, called the *marquisa.*'

"'Bravo! Mariquita! Bravo!' was shouted on all sides.

At last she made a sign with her small and finely-shaped hand, and the storm was quieted as if by enchantment; she was going to sing. You know, since you have heard it, what an admirable contralto voice she possesses. It was astonishing, marvelous! The part suited her. She put into it all the grace and passion it required; and, when, in the last act, she commenced the famous *morceau:*

"'O transport! C'est mon reve perdu
Que rayonne et m'enivre.
Son amour m'est rendu!
Mon Dieu, laisse-moi vivre!'

"I saw more than one dark face, swarthy and

hardened, belonging to fierce men of the *campo*, covered with tears.

"As for me, I was wild! I believed I had forgotten her, and would never see her again: and here she appeared to me all at once, in the brilliancy that the stage lends a woman. Crowned with the glory of a part full of charm and poetry; covered with diamonds, in a dazzling costume which brought out all her beauty, her magnificent neck, her marble-like arms, her finely-rounded wrists, and her child-like hands; throwing to an idolatrous crowd the sonorous waves of one of the warmest and most captivating voices I have ever heard.

"I sat there, thunderstruck, without applauding, or withdrawing my eyes from her, not knowing whether I still loved her, or hated her, not even knowing any longer whether she was my wife or not, having but one fixed and furious idea: to see her; it was a sort of fury, delirium, monomania."

Cuchillo, as we have said, was sitting upright, and regarded the marquis with a strange and glittering look. As the narrative advanced, his cheeks were colored with large, red spots, his lips were contracted, and his nostrils quivered.

Louis Clermont followed all these changes and studied all the indications, without saying a word.

As to the marquis, his mind was far away from the *corral:* he no longer saw his auditors, being blinded and carried away by the ardor of his remembrances, and the passions they evoked.

"If I had known that she was at Buenos Ayres," pursued he, in a still lower voice, and almost to himself, "I would have fled from the place, as one flees from an infected spot, where the yellow fever reigns. This woman had always been fatal to me; she would continue to be so to the end. *Now* she will make me suffer no more!" he added, in a fierce tone.

"Where was I?" said he, suddenly, after a short silence, which no one had interrupted. "Ah! I remember!— I had arrived, the evening before, after a long journey across the *campo;* I had gone to bed

early, in one of those inns where the *gauchos* generally put up. It was the time of the carnival; I knew nothing of it, and, above all, I was ignorant of what the carnival is like at Buenos Ayres. So, on the next morning—a day which nothing will ever be able to efface from my life—I rose early, dressed myself, and went down-stairs. The public room was full of *gauchos*, who were drinking, laughing, and playing at cards, or at *morra*, which the Italians have introduced there.

"After a glance at the crowd, I started out.

"'Say! where are you going, comrade?' asked a voice.

"'I am going to look about the city.'

"'Ah! ah! you are going to promenade the streets, *to-day!*' they all cried out, with great shouts of laughter.

"'Well, and what is there so extraordinary about that?' replied I, slightly irritated at their hilarity.

"'Nothing, friend, nothing! Go, take your walk, and amuse yourself!'

"They all interchanged glances of intelligence. I shrugged my shoulders, not understanding what it meant, and went out.

"'Much pleasure to you, *senor!*' said, in a mocking voice, a little servant, who passed at the moment, her sleeves rolled up to her shoulders, and her petticoats turned up to her knees, holding in each hand a heavy bucket of water, which she was about to place on the housetop. I went out, without making any reply.

"I was, I acknowledge, greatly surprised at finding the streets deserted; the city seemed as if dead. The few people who happened to be out walked hurriedly, keeping to the middle of the streets; some were armed with umbrellas, and others wore rubber overcoats, notwithstanding the brilliant sun and the torrid heat.

"The passing street-cars had all their windows closed. The conductors wore large waterproof cloaks, and near them, on the platforms, were buckets of water."

While thus speaking, Paul de Kandos appeared to court delay. One could see that he was making this part of his recital as long as possible, like the invalid, who, condemned to undergo some painful operation, seeks to prolong the preparations, in order to retard the fatal instant.

"I was walking, with head erect, when, all at once, I received, full in the face, a dash of cold water, which inundated me. I angrily jumped backward, seeking from whence it came—when I received a second bath. Then, on all the roofs, appeared the smiling faces of women, who were armed with bowls and buckets capable of holding water, or from which water could be thrown.

"The street-car passengers were mounted on their seats. The conductors, streaming with water, seized the buckets beside them, and threw their contents at the women they saw upon the door-steps, or in the streets. This strange battle was a war of sexes. A man who would attack a man, or a woman who would attack a woman, would produce a scandal that would cost him, or her, dear, where everyone carries a revolver or a knife.

"This was the carnival; the carnival of Buenos Ayres, and it was to last three days.

"I was cross and exasperated, but what could I do?

"I could not seek a quarrel with these women, who laughed while they showered water on me from above. I beat a retreat, at a run, and regained the inn I had quitted only a half hour before.

"I now understood the laughing of the *gauchos*, and the mocking salute the little servant had given me:

"'Much pleasure to you!'

"My arrival was saluted with a volley of pleasantries and applause.

"'You now know what the carnival is, friend?' said some one.

"'It is idiotic!' replied I.

"'For those who are sprinkled, but not for the

sprinklers. Come up with us on the roof! You will there see the *señoritas* at work, and it will put you in a better humor!'

"The fellow was right. I changed my clothes, so they might get dry; and, during the rest of the day, I took part in this diversion, which pleased me as much as an actor, as it had angered me as a victim. We drank *caña* and Catalonian wine.

"At eight in the evening it all ceased, and walking about became once more a possibility. Somebody propesed the theater—I accepted—and you know who I recognized there!

* * * * "This day of pleasure," he resumed, with an effort, although somewhat calmed by the recital, which had, for a moment, distracted him from the horror of his thoughts, "was to be followed by the most dreadful night of my whole life!'

CHAPTER XVII.

IN WHICH THE HUSBAND ACTS THE LOVER.

THE marquis passed his hand over his forehead, and remained for some time silent. One would have said that he had ended his recital, or that he did not feel courageous enough to tell what remained to be told.

It was Cuchillo, this time, who resumed the conversation. Addressing Paul de Kandos, he said, in a brief and husky voice, which he forced himself to render steady:

"Well! sir, we are waiting for you to finish!"

De Kandos trembled.

"Finish," repeated he. "The end—yes—it is necessary; I will execute myself. Ah! Clermont," he added, turning toward the tutor who had launched him in life, "you can never guess the evil you have done me, in constraining me to relate these frightful scenes. But, since you know all, since you have

accused me, I ought, yes, I *ought* to tell exactly what has happened."

His face suddenly changed; it re-took the fierce expression which it had worn at the remembrance of his wife's desertion, and he violently exclaimed:

"Listen, then! The play is about to end. I rushed outside, in order to gain the door through which the performers came out, and to accost or to follow Mariquita. My ideas were not very clear; I was obeying an irresistible instinct. But, quick as I had been, when I arrived at this door there was already a large and animated crowd there, which prevented my near approach. All the *marquesa's* admirers had had the same idea. I waited a good half-hour, fretting, and saying to myself: 'The crowd will open in order to let her pass through, and then I can follow her.' For I was ignorant where she lived, and some sentiment, I do not know what, prevented my asking. It seemed to me that if I uttered her name everybody would guess or understand that I was her husband. And the very idea humiliated and upset me.

"Finally the crowd became agitated; loud cries arose, I was bruskly pushed backward, and I partially saw, like a flash, the vague form of a woman entering a carriage, stationed near an exit I had not perceived. A violent surging of the crowd threw me far in the rear, and the vehicle passed before me at a fast gallop, while some devotees accompanied it, crying as they ran: '*Vive la Mariquita!*'

"Surprise and disappointment at first riveted me to the spot. When I came to myself my wife was already out of sight. I felt enraged, which restored all my audacity, and, turning to a person standing near me, I asked:

"'Where does the *prima donna* live?'

"'Liberty street, thirteen hundred and thirteen,' he replied. 'The house is easy to recognize; it is the only one of its kind in all Buenos Ayres.'

"I asked where Liberty street was, and hastened off in that direction. Once in that street I proceeded more slowly. It was late; about one in the morning.

I did not know the city, and I carefully looked at all the houses in order to be able to distinguish the one inhabited by the *prima donna.*

"After a walk of a quarter of an hour, I suddenly arrested my steps. I had arrived at my destination. On my left I distinguished a kind of small Swiss *chalet.* The lower windows were protected by strong bars, as is common here, and, at the right of the entrance, there arose a low wall, behind which one could see the tops of some trees. There was, then, a garden. A vague glimmer, proceeding from the windows of the ground floor, which opened on the garden, proved to me that the mistress of the house had not yet retired. My heart beat violently and my legs trembled. What should I do? knock at the door? ask to see her?

"It was evident that at such an hour she would not receive a stranger, above all one of miserable aspect; and my costume, as you see, revealed nothing of the gentleman of good family.

"Should I make myself known? say who I was? That would be to have an entrance refused to me; for I was convinced that the return and presence of her husband could only be disagreeable to her or frighten her!

"And if servants closed the door to me, it would be almost impossible to get into her presence, at least immediately—and I did not wish to wait.

"I therefore resolved to enter, without asking permission, and announce myself in person. This was comparatively easy, although it offered some danger. If I was surprised, it would be a knife-thrust, or a shot, without any words, and the motive of my visit would be inquired into afterward.

"I stood there, then, for some minutes, listening attentively for any noise coming from the house. But it was perfectly quiet. I placed my ear against the wall, to hear if there was anyone in the garden. It appeared deserted. Not a grain of sand cracked under the lightest footstep. It would have seemed as if all the household were asleep, if it had not been for

the light from the windows which cast its mysterious rays across the darkness of the night.

"Finally, fearing if I hesitated longer the breaking day would render my enterprise impossible, I decided to act. I unrolled my lasso, threw it around a branch of a eucalyptus tree which overhung the wall, and, with my feet against the latter, I soon climbed to the top, from whence I jumped lightly to the ground on the opposite side.

"The garden was empty. On the left arose the front of the *chalet*. The light proceeded from a room on the ground floor, the door and the two windows of which were wide open. Only a kind of fine mosquito-netting hung before them, allowing the fresh night air to enter, but preventing the entrance of the mosquitoes, which the light had attracted.

"With the step of a wolf I went toward this room, and stopped before one of the low windows. Thus my sight traveled at will over the apartment, lighted by a candelebra containing perfumed candles.

"Mariquita was there—and alone! Near a little Japanese table, on which stood the *yerba* urn and the candelabra, hung a hammock. Mariquita was lying in it, softly swinging to and fro.

"She had put on her night dress; her elbows were leaning on the side of the hammock; her hands were clasped. Her loosened hair fell back from her face. She swung herself lazily, while gazing toward where I was, and smiled at some secret thought; for, between her dark red lips shone her small, pearl-like teeth.

"She was neither asleep nor awake. She was dreaming. I could see the warm blood flowing under the skin of her rosy cheeks, and the tips of her delicate ears, in which two large diamonds shone like stars. They were only less brilliant than her shining eyes, which were full of a delightful languor.

"Little by little a genuine hallucination took possession of me. Her glance fired and intoxicated me. I all at once believed that it was addressed to me—that she saw me, and that her dark and caressing eyes were saying:

"'Come! I am waiting for you!'

"I sprang forward, gained the door, and fell into the room, tearing aside the light gauze, which was the only barrier. I stood before her.

"'I am here!' said I."

The marquis stopped, carrying his hand to his throat, parched with emotion.

"Drink!" said he, in a choking voice.

Cuchillo hastened forward, without giving Clermont timo to move, and tendered Paul a gourd full of *caña.*

CHAPTER XVIII.

A CONJUGAL SCENE.

PAUL DE KANDOS drank with avidity several mouthfuls of the strong liquor, and rapidly resumed:

"On seeing a man enter, Mariquita, thrusting behind her with a quick gesture, the hammock in which she had been but a second before so softly swinging, stood upright before me, shivering and frightened.

"'Who are you?' she said.

"I leaned forward and replied:

"'Look!—Don't you recognize me?'

"My voice made her tremble.

"Meanwhile her great black eyes searched my features with an astonished air. It was plain that my face, owing to the changes of years, the long beard I had let grow, and my complexion, browned by the sun and exposure on the *campo*, only recalled confused and uncertain memories. Nevertheless, after a rapid examination, I saw her tremble anew. Her eyes grew still larger. She seized the candelabra, held it close to my face, and exclaimed, recoiling at the same time:

"'Ah! it is you!'

"'Yes, your husband!'

"At first she appeared stupefied; then her expression became at once harsh and disdainful.

"'What do you wish from me, and how came you here?' she resumed, in a cold tone.

"'I am Paul de Kandos, madame the marchioness!' replied I, violently. 'And you ask me how I come to be with you, and what I wish?'

"'Yes,' said she, in a dry and provoking tone. 'Yes, I ask you that.'

"'You are my wife.'

"'*Legally*—it is true; but, most assuredly, you are no longer, and never will be, my husband. It is now fifteen years since we separated—I was nothing but a child, then; now I am a woman, accustomed to independence, who has never loved you, and who is not going to commence it now, I assure you.'

"While she was speaking to me—while she was repulsing me in this hard manner, I could only see her enchanting form, I could hear nothing but her admirable voice, and the fire of her black eyes kindled anew the flame I had thought extinguished. Her words were lashing me, but the pain they caused was mingled with a frightful feeling of hatred and love.

"'Maria,' I said, 'I, too, have become a man; I have rights! I am your husband—consequently I am at home, and——'

"'Rights!' replied she, ironically. 'That word alone would make me hate you! There is nothing of the honest woman about me. I proved it in marrying you, without love, at sixteen, in order to bear your name: believing, by that marriage, I would be rich; and finding it droll that I, a *gaucho's* daughter, a street dancer, should bear the title of marchioness. While I was your wife, contempt for your character was added to my want of love for you. I left you, resolved never to live with you again. I have riches, luxury, success, glory, the enchantment of a theatrical life, and reputation; I am free as air, at once a queen and independent! What do you bring me? Nothing! Why should I resume a yoke which never suited either my tastes or my temperament? Leave me, then, and think of me no more than I shall of you!'

"'But, Mariquita, I love you!'

"'What is that to me!'

"'Why will you not return to me, accept my name? Shall I, your husband—your first lover, also—be the only one you deny yourself to?' I added, with insulting bitterness.

"'I was but fifteen—a child—when I first knew you. We were both foolish, and, with follies—the shortest are the best.'

"'Mariquita,' said I, 'you are rich, while I am poor; my life is a daily struggle against poverty. But, I love you, and I am your husband.'

"'If you would but be reasonable,' said she, quickly, 'I am ready to prove to you that, after all, I am kind-hearted. It is true that I am rich and you are poor; formerly you divided with me. Eh! well, let us still divide. I can give you the means of returning to Europe, and there commencing your life over again in a brilliant fashion. Oh! yes, as much as you may wish!'

"'Be silent!' I cried, furiously; 'I don't want your infamous gold! What I do wish, is yourself alone!'

"'Never!'

"'Take care!' My head swam, and the blood rushed to my eyes; everything was red. I advanced toward her, with raised arms—she was afraid—she recoiled; but her pride upheld her, and she answered me, trying to smile, and provoking me with her glance.

"'Ah! ah! threats . . . I like that better! You do not know the *marquesa!*'

"I all at once saw a sharp-pointed stiletto in her white hand. Where had she taken it from? I do not know. I stopped, not on account of the weapon, but before her look, full of hatred and anger.

"The more she resisted and braved me, the more attractive and irresistible she appeared to me. I fell on my knees.

"'Mariquita,' said I, extending my hands toward her, 'Mariquita, do not drive me mad, do not push me

to despair; I love you, have always loved you, and will ever love you! Can you not love me?'

"She looked at me for a moment, and I saw contempt succeed anger in her eyes.

"'Listen,' she said to me, 'this must be ended. You will understand nothing until I tell you that I, also, love as I have never before loved; I love a poor *gaucho*, poorer than you, without rank or parentage, abandoned by all. I cannot see him as often as I wish, yet I am true to him because I love him. He is a man, proud, uncontrollable, and uncontrolled—like me; he would kill me if I deceived him, and I adore him for that reason. I had *never* loved, until he taught me what love was, and, in this, he has given me more than I could give him, if I gave him all my fortune, which he refuses and repulses with horror. I belong to him and *will* belong only to him. So, go!"

"She walked toward me, pale and resolute, pointing toward the door with outstretched hand!

"'Ah! you love some one else!' muttered I, in a choking voice, and slowly rising. The avowal of this triumphant love, while repulsing my own, rendered me furious.

"'Yes.'

"'That is your last word?'

"'My last.'

"'Well!' shouted I, bounding toward her, 'you shall not be his, nor any other's! Die, then, wretch, and suffer as much as I do!'

"I had drawn my knife, and, before she could foresee my intention, or stop me, I plunged it into her breast. She uttered a horrible cry, staggered, held out her hands to sustain herself, and upset the stand on which were the candles, one of which set fire to the light stuff of which her night-dress was made, and the muslin window curtains.

"I rushed through the door, climbed the wall—I know not how—and found myself once more in the street. I believed I had made my escape; I ran through various streets, but it seemed that I had been

going in a circle, for, at the end of a few minutes, I found myself once more before the *chalet.* It was in flames; a crowd had assembled—they cried: 'Fire! fire!' 'Where is the *marquesa?*' 'Save Mariquita!'

"These cries, this crowd, brought me to my senses. It seemed to me that everyone must know that I was her murderer. Day was commencing to break. I at last found the way to the inn, got my horse, and, at a gallop, gained the *pampa,* fleeing straight before me —believing I was followed—up to the moment when I arrived in sight of this *corral.*"

CHAPTER XIX.

TWO TO ONE.

WE have been unable to reproduce the abrupt and jerky style of utterance, sometimes fierce and precipitate, again, slow and almost plaintive, of Paul, the Marquis of Kandos.

His terrible and ferocious act inspired him with no horror; he exhibited no remorse, but only the fever and terror of a man unused to crime, and fearful of punishment.

When he had finished, he cast a look of despair on his auditors, seeking to read their thoughts in their faces, and imploring a word of indulgence or encouragement, which, after all, he might have hoped for on the part of his two companions, whom he knew were not scrupulous, and were, doubtless, greater criminals than himself.

But Louis Clermont paid no attention to *him;* he was looking at Cuchillo, and Paul trembled on beholding the latter's face. Nothing, indeed, could be more strange, or more terrible, than his expression.

During the last part of this long recital, Cuchillo had not uttered a word, nor made the slightest sign; his frightfully discomposed features, and the slumber-

ing fire in his eyes, alone told of the sad and passionate interest he took in it. He had become as pale as a corpse. Two tears, half dried by the heat of anger, ran slowly down his hollow cheeks, while his clenched teeth and distorted mouth bore witness to the superhuman effort he was making to control himself. Finally he turned around with an abrupt movement, which was almost automatic, and hissed, rather than spoke, these words to Clermont:

"Is this true?"

"What?"

"That she is dead, like this?"

"Yes," said Clermont. "And that is why I refused to answer you this morning, when you asked me if I had any news of Mariquita. I thought you would know it all soon enough, and I wished that her assassin himself should apprise you of it."

Cuchillo gave utterance to a dull roar, and arose with a bound.

Paul de Kandos, frightened at the other's looks, and feeling the approach of the tempest which threatened him from this quarter, was already on his feet.

"Monster!" said Cuchillo, in a terrible voice, which seemed like a burst of thunder after the lightning flash.

Paul recoiled two or three steps.

"This is treachery!" he murmured, to Louis Clermont. "You swore that I could tell all before this man. You lied! He has heard my confession, and will betray me!"

"Betray you? no! Punish you, yes!"

"And by what right?" demanded Mariquita's husband, still recoiling before Cuchillo's fiery glance, from which the tears had entirely disappeared.

"By what right?"

"Yes, by what right? I was her husband, after all, and the husband has a right to kill an adulterous wife."

"Be silent, wretch! do not put forward that excuse!" exclaimed Cuchillo, becoming more and more threaten-

ing. "If the husband who respects himself, and is deceived, gives way to an act of despair and noble indignation at seeing his name compromised, dishonored, there may be excuse for him. But *you* lost that right the day when, knowing she had deceived you, you submitted to dishonor. You have killed her after having been separated fifteen years, without having ever made any attempt to recover her—and how? in a cowardly and brutal fashion, by making her perish amid the horrible tortures of fire, for, undoubtedly, her palpitating body had not yet lost all sensibility to pain! It was not through a noble jealousy, which you could avow; it was not because she had a lover—you would have forgiven her that, as you forgave the others; it *was* because she refused to become doubly adulterous, in deceiving her lover for you——"

"Ah! ah! I understand," said de Kandos, whose fury was now reawakened. "*You* are the famous *gaucho*——"

"Yes, I am he!"

"Ah! well, so much the better then. My vengeance is complete. I have made you, through her, suffer as much as I did on account of you."

"I leave my grief out of the question," replied Cuchillo, "although it has been and still is terrible. But I am going to avenge the poor woman!"

He drew his *navaja*. Paul, who watched all his movements, did likewise, and they found themselves opposed to each other, both armed with the terrible knife used by the *gauchos* of the pampa, and separated only by the length of their arms.

Louis Clermont, who had listened to this dialogue, and followed the scene in silence, and with an impassioned attention, at first almost joyovs, became suddenly annoyed, and, hastening between the two adversaries, he bruskly seized Cuchillo by the wrist and drew him to one side.

"Imbecile!" he muttered in his ear, "what are you going to do?"

"Kill him!"

"Kill him?" Clermont shrugged his shoulders,

"or be killed by him. Fool! He must not be provoked—he must be knocked on the head."

"Assassinate him?"

"*Parbleu.*"

"Never!"

"But if he kills you?"

"I wish to avenge her, or die for her. She died for me!"

"Let us lay aside chivalric ideas now!" murmured Clermont, with an oath so awful we dare not put it down in cold blood. "You make me sorry! You will never amount to anything!"

"Leave me!" said Cuchillo, with horror and contempt. "Leave me!" and he pushed him violently away.

"What a misfortune!" grumbled Clermont, "to have to act with such instruments. And if he kills him!" he added, in a lower tone, looking at Paul de Kandos, gloomily.

Cuchillo had returned towards his adversary, who was rolling his blanket around his left arm. The *gaucho* did the same, and calling out in a vibrating voice:

"On guard, Monsieur le Marquis!"

"I am ready!" responded the other.

They threw themselves on each other, their left arms advanced like shields, and their right ones raised in the air. The knife blades flashed in the sun. Paul de Kandos was no coward; in fact, far from it. He was only cowardly in regard to his passions, which mastered him, and which he could not master. But he had physical courage, and accepted the combat with a kind of satisfaction. It was a diversion and distraction from the anguish and fever which had been consuming him since he had committed the deed we have heard him describe.

At the first pass Cuchillo felt that he had an able adversary before him; one who did not recoil, and who had as great thirst for his blood as he had for the marquis's. Otherwise this first shock of the encounter

had no result. The knives had only penetrated the woolen cloth protecting the left arms.

Both bounded backwards with equal agility, threw themselves on each other again, and, at the second meeting, blood flowed. Cuchillo had been wounded in the side.

This time they did not separate; breast to breast, face to face, feeling each other's breath, burned with the flames of each other's eyes, their two armed hands met, followed each other, were lowered and raised together, without their being able to disengage the knives long enough to strike. This lasted for fully a minute.

They both felt their strength decreasing, especially Cuchillo, who had lost much blood.

Comprehending the danger of his situation, he resolved to bring it to an end; using his whole energy, with a desperate bound he threw himself backwards, in order to again take the field, and return for the last time, with all his advantages, against his, as yet, unharmed enemy.

Louis Clermont, having been unable to prevent the duel, after a first movement of rage had withdrawn in such a way as to get behind the marquis.

Motionless, Cuchillo and the marquis gazed at each other for an instant; then, collecting themselves, they again made a spring forward. This third attack ought evidently to be the last and decide the fate of the contestants.

Such was the case.

Cuchillo rushed forward with raised arms. Paul de Kandos had raised his at the same time. But, at the moment Cuchillo reached him, this arm, in place of striking forward, was drawn back, leaving his breast unprotected, and Cuchillo plunged into it twice, up to the handle, his large and sharp-bladed *navaja*.

The marquis uttered two hollow cries, and staggered; his lips were covered with a bloody froth, his glance became clouded, and he fell to the earth murmuring:

"Treason! assass—" he could not finish, and writhing in horrible convulsions, expired.

Cuchillo paused, surprised, overcome, looking straight before him.

He saw Louis Clermont at a distance, holding one end of his lasso, the other end of which, in winding itself around Paul's right arm, had paralyzed him and given him over to his adversary's blows.

"Ah! wretch!" yelled Cuchillo, beside himself. "What have you done?"

"I have made you a MARQUIS AND A MILLIONAIRE!" triumphantly replied Clermont.

CHAPTER XX.

THE TOILET OF THE DEAD.

"YOU have made me an assassin!" replied Cuchillo, with furious despair; "and I do not know what keeps me from laying you there beside him."

"No nonsense!" exclaimed Clermont, placing himself outside of the gate. "Is this the way you thank me for helping you to avenge Mariquita's frightful death?"

"It was not thus that I wished to avenge her—Ah! poor woman!—" And, all at once, sobs tore his breast.

On seeing him weep, his companion felt re-assured.

"In the first place," he resumed, "you are not there for nothing. You fought him loyally, as you wished, risking your own skin; risking it so much, indeed, that you had a hole made in it. You would now be there," he added, pointing to the corpse, "if I had not interfered; for, wounded as you were, your strength was failing; you were no longer cool, and I saw perfectly well that you were about to receive your quietus. You have, then, nothing to reproach yourself with, and ought to be thankful to me; but I am used to your ingratitude."

Louis Clermont had not exaggerated. In fact, Cuchillo had lost, and was still losing blood.

Now that the excitement of the struggle was over, and that the reaction had set in, he staggered, and would have fallen if Clermont had not hastened to support him.

"What did I tell you?" cried the old convict. "Come, lie down and let me, before everything, examine your wound. This is a time for preparing our harvest, and not for dying."

Cuchillo lay on the sand, in the shadow of the wagon, too feeble to resist or to any longer feel anger. He silently abandoned himself to the experienced cares of his companion. The latter nimbly lifted the *gaucho's* jacket, unfastened his belt, raised his shirt and laid bare his companion's side, in which there was a large wound which was bleeding freely.

"It will amount to nothing," said Clermont, after a short inspection. "It is a large wound, but not very deep, and has only gone through the skin. There will be no trace of it in a few days. It is only necessary to stop the flow of blood."

He then washed the wound with *cana*, which made the sufferer flinch; then tearing off a piece of his own shirt, for linen was not very plentiful in the corral, he made a bandage of it, drew the two lips of the wound together, and ended a dressing, which, considering his opportunities, was not unskillfully performed.

"There!" said he. "That's all right, for the present. Now, swallow a little brandy, and remain quiet." As he spoke, he handed a gourdful of *cana* to Cuchillo, who drank it in one swallow, obeying like a child.

A great prostration took possession of him, under the double influence of the violent bleeding he had undergone and the poignant sorrow and frightful despair into which he had been plunged by the news of Mariquita's death.

"Let us see," he said to Cuchillo, "since you are calmer, listen to me, and understand the position. It is an admirable one, and I have performed a masterstroke, which would suffice to immortalize me were it

known. But I renounce this glory, and will be content to receive, with you, the savory fruits of it. Firstly—peace in regard to your pretended assassination. I committed it, not you, since you knew nothing of it—it is true that you might have arrested your hand, on seeing that he was defenseless—but we will pass over that. I did my duty; you were a dead man—if I had not acted. You thought only of avenging your mistress, while I—I had something else in view. Ever since I had recognized him, and had learned of the murder he had committed—I have been maturing the admirable plan which has at last been realized by your unconscious hand."

"What plan?" asked Cuchillo.

"My good fellow," continued Clermont, "it happens, I know not how, that you resemble the marquis, as one drop of water resembles another. About the same age, you are not more than two years his elder, with the same figure, and same colored hair and beard, except that yours is a trifle the lighter; but that can be corrected with hair dye, and one would have to see you side by side to notice it. The same features and eyes; in short, if you had been made to order you could not be more like him."

"Well?"

"Well! you shall see."

Louis Clermont arose, for he had seated himself near his friend, approached the still warm body of the marquis, and coolly commenced to undress it. This done, he returned to Cuchillo, and said to him:

"Take off your clothes."

"Why?"

"You are strong enough; besides, I will help you."

"But," said Cuchillo, "what is your object?"

"To make you noble and rich."

"I—don't—understand."

"On the contrary, you understand it very well!"

"You wish to substitute me for this man?"

"You have said it."

"It is ignoble—besides, it is impossible.—I refuse."

"I wish it. It is possible. And you will accept."

"No!"

"Yes!—I have followed out this idea since morning. It is the only way for us to get out of the scrape we have been in ever since we escaped from the galleys. It is fortune, luxury, safety—there must be no hesitation."

"But—this depends on me, on me alone, and, again, I refuse."

"No, my son, you accept. Do you prefer that I should denounce you for the murder you have committed?"

"Dog! it was you—And you will be hung as well as I."

"Possibly!—but that wouldn't save you! In the first place, I did not strike the blow. I could prove it. It was you. They would believe everything bad of an escaped galleys' convict, such as Jean Pruneau, called Cuchillo, already once condemned for a murder—You are not a native, but a foreigner. They would convict you out of hand—Is this what you desire? Is this the termination you dream of to the dog's life we have led in this d—d country, which I thought you wished to leave in some other way than by the scaffold or a return to the galleys?"

"Oh, yes!" murmured Cuchillo.

"Then let me act. I will afterward explain the whole plan to you. It is certain. What a pretty revenge it will be against this man, who has stabbed and burned Mariquita, to place you in his skin, assume his title, and eat up the millions of his papa!"

Cuchillo still made a slight resistance; but Louis Clermont left him no choice, placing, as it were, the pistol to his head, and Cuchillo had become too corrupt at the galleys and in the old convict's society; he was discouraged, and had fallen too low not to let himself be seduced. He, therefore, ceased to resist, and acquiesced in all Clermont proposed.

The latter washed, in a neighboring pool, the jacket and belt of the marquis, which were saturated with blood, placed them for a few moments to dry under the warm sun of the *campo*, and, with the rest of the

costume, put them on Cuchillo, who could not repress a shudder at feeling on his body the clothes of the man he had killed, and which fitted him the same as if they had been made for him.

In the jacket-pocket was found a pocket-book belonging to the marquis, which was full of papers and letters.

"We will look over these later on!" philosphically said Clermont.

He then took the living man's clothes, and, with an adroitness and care which was revolting to Cuchillo, and made him turn away his eyes, he proceeded with the toilet of the dead body, which was not rigid. When he had dressed it, he took the marquis's *navaja* and cut two slits in the jacket corresponding to the wounds in the breast, and then made a wound in the side corresponding to the rent made in Cuchillo's belt by his adversary's weapon. He then placed in the hand of the corpse Cuchillo's knife, and gave the latter the marquis's *navaja*.

"There, that's all right!" said he, complacently regarding his work. But, suddenly striking his forehead, he cried: "Ah! the beard! Where are your razors?"

"They were in my belt."

The old convict proceeded to unroll the belt from around the corpse.

"They are still here," said he, drawing them out and opening one.

"What are you going to do?" asked Cuchillo, puzzled, and commencing to get really interested in the scene.

"Shave him, to assist the likeness."

"Have you the courage?" asked Cuchillo, with a mixture of surprise, horror and admiration for this superiority in crime.

"You shall see. Look here!" And, with a hand which did not show the least sign of trembling, he smoothly shaved the lifeless face, leaving nothing but the mustache.

The resemblance became astonishing.

"But I have no beard," murmured Cuchillo.

"You can let it grow. It will not take over a month."

Clermont stepped back a few paces, regarding alternately the dead and the living man, like an artist comparing a portrait with the original.

"Nothing is wanting!" he finally said. "A mother would be deceived."

He clapped his hands with satisfaction, put the razors back in the belt, formerly Cuchillo's, but now surrounding the body of Paul de Kandos, and, seating himself beside his companion, said:

"Now, let us have a talk."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE TOILET OF THE LIVING.

CUCHILLO no longer resisted. His loss of blood had calmed him. The memory of Mariquita occupied his heart, almost breaking it. Everything was equally indifferent to him, and Clermont's plan, at once simple and complicated, the means of executing which he did not more than half see, excited his curiosity for the present.

"Recall to yourself," said the ex-convict, "what I said to you yesterday! (I am on the watch for a chance, and I will seize by the hair the first that presents itself?) The marquis was that chance. As soon as I recognized him, I saw what was to be done. You understand that it would have been very easy for me, when, this morning, I knew I was face to face with my former pupil, and had conceived the romance in which we are going to play the principal parts, to have killed this said individual, without character or energy, but I first wished to hear from his own mouth the story of his whole life, so as not to be ignorant of any important detail, and you must hear it also as well as I, in order to engrave it on your memory, that you might

be able to recall it at need, in case I should forget any part of it.

"On arriving at Buenos Ayres I heard of the *marquesa's* death. The whole city was talking of, and deploring it. I assured myself that no one suspected the truth, or that it was a case of murder. They were absolutely ignorant of all concerning the marquis or the part he had played. You know how I discovered his identity, and by what ruse I led him to a confession he was unable to retract."

"Why did you not forewarn me of this terrible misfortune?"

"Because you would have listened no longer—because I desired, on the other hand, that you should hear the news from him! Because I wished, counting on your fury and thirst for vengeance, that he should perish by your hand."

Cuchillo raised himself on his elbow.

"Oh! I know you, my good fellow," pursued Clermont. "Having need of you, I had to compromise you, in such a way that you would become my accomplice, and the most compromised of the two. Without that, at any instant you might become disgusted, and threaten to slip through my fingers, whilst now I hold you, and there is, henceforward, a new tie between us. I have succeeded. There is nothing to be done but to reap the harvest. Your resemblance to the marquis is complete. You know his life, and have his papers, and I, on my side, having lived near him and his home, possess a thousand pieces of essential information. When his body is found, more or less disfigured by the birds of prey, it is *your* death certificate that will be drawn up:

"'Jean Pruneau, commonly called Cuchillo, is dead. Long live Paul, Marquis of Kandos!'"

"What are you going to do next?"

"We will escape across the *pampa*, gain the La Plata, seize a boat, and cross the river. It is over thirty miles wide, but we have worked long enough at the oars, in boats belonging to the State, not to get scared at such a trifle; and, besides, it is less tiresome and

less dangerous than escaping by way of Cayenne. We will land either in Brazil or Paraguay, gain Montevideo, and there we will embark for Europe."

"But what if they should pursue the marquis for having murdered me?" asked Cuchillo.

"To do that, it would be necessary to establish his personality. He is unknown at Buenos Ayres, where he only passed thirty-six hours, without boasting of either his title or his name. He escaped the *campo*, without anyone knowing him or following his track. They will rather accuse me, your companion, who has disappeared, leaving your body on the sand."

"That is true—but then——"

"Then, I will have changed my appearance. Trust me for that! And I will manufacture false papers, *entirely regular*—you know what I can do in that way."

"Oh, yes!"

"And will suppress *Louis Clermont*, as we have suppressed *Cuchillo*. This done, that is, in a month or two, when your beard is grown, and we have studied our parts, we will land in Europe. There we will procure some indispensable papers, your marriage certificate, and the birth certificate of his—*your*—daughter, and depart for *Franche-Comté*——"

"Without a cent?"

"The poorer we are the better, for the marquis was ruined and without resources."

"Doubtless. But how will we explain your presence?"

"You will be supposed to have met me, a poor professor, at *La Plata*. I will have saved your life—and gratitude will have compelled you to bring me with you."

"And, afterwards? How will this profit you?"

"Eh! my good fellow, our friend's purse is our own, and I expect to dip into yours without ceremony. We will be rich together, or lost together."

"I understand."

"Very good. We will present ourselves at the Kandos mansion."

"And the father?"

"He is blind."

"And the daughter, Mademoiselle Annette?"

"She has never seen the marquis."

"And the peasants, servants, friends and neighbors?"

"It is twenty years since the marquis set foot in the country. I asked him that."

"But they know you there."

"Nonsense! I remained there three months, more than twenty years ago. I have altered twice since then—and will change myself still more. However, I remember the *château* as if I had only left it yesterday. I will draw a plan of it for you. You must study it with me, for you ought to enter it as if you already knew it, and were at home."

"But who knows whether they may not have made alterations in and about the house?"

"What difference will that make? It is the *château* of former days that you should know, not that of to-day."

"True. But the duke will drive me away."

"No. You will return as a repentant son. He is old—and will be happy to forgive you."

"Nothing goes to prove it."

"Your daughter, at need, will plead for you."

"She may have been brought up with a contempt and hatred for her father."

"At all events, you are still the heir, and the old man will not be long in dying. By the way, you must learn the hand-writing and signature of the marquis. I will teach you how."

"This is all very ticklish."

"Not the least in the world—and, with audacity and coolness, we will succeed! Do you prefer poverty in this d——d country?"

"Oh! no."

"Then, let us go gayly on!" Clermont reflected a moment, and resumed: "I am sure that the duke will receive you with open arms."

"Why?"

"Because Mariquita is dead. You will be a wid-

ower, repentant, touching and submissive. Everything will go on wheels."

Night was approaching. Clermont observed the horizon.

"How do you feel now?" he suddenly asked Cuchillo.

"Better!—much better!" answered the latter.

"Try to get up."

Cuchillo arose.

"Could you keep yourself on your horse?"

"Yes, I believe so."

"And travel some distance to-night?"

"I will try, and I think I can do it, if necessary, even if this wound does cause me some pain."

"Well, then, we must depart, and leave the *corral*, so as not to get foolishly caught near this body while disguise is still incomplete."

"Yes—yes—let us go!" said Cuchillo, eagerly. The corpse rendered him uncomfortable. He was in haste to get away. Besides, if he were surprised and caught as he now was, all would be lost.

"Let us eat, first," said Clermont.

They hastily swallowed a few pieces of mutton, and, this short repast over, the marquis's assassin resumed the conversation:

"We will follow the most deserted path of the *campo*," said he, resolutely. "It will be longer, but safer."

He hastened to saddle two horses, gave a last glance at the corpse, whitened by the rising moon, and addressing Cuchillo, said:

"Monsieur le marquis, let us mount."

Cuchillo, leaning on his accomplice's arm, managed to mount with some difficulty, after giving vent to a few groans torn from him by his painful wound. But once in his seat, he seemed strong enough.

"Whip up, coachman!" cried Clermont. "Adieu! *pampa!* Adieu, poverty, *cáña, yerba* and saltless mutton! Advance, millions and a gentleman's life! Monsieur le marquis, permit me to show you the way!"

He put spurs to his horse, and they departed, rais-

ing a double cloud of dust, which, in a few moments, disappeared on the limitless horizon.

The dead body was left alone, lying in the position in which it had fallen. Its white face stood out in the wavering darkness. But soon a dull noise was heard overhead, and the owl of the desert, while describing its slow circles, called its companions to the feast prepared for them by treachery and crime.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE INQUEST.

ONE can readily understand that the *pampa*, traveled over as it is by the immense droves which, guarded by *gauchos*, cover it, is less frequented than a great European highway. As large tracts of the barren, burnt and desolate land are required for feeding sheep, each *corral* is at a great distance from its neighbor. The life here is analagous to that of the wandering Arabs on the African desert. In the absence of villages and fixed habitations, the *gauchos* move from place to place, according to caprice.

There is nothing extraordinary, therefore, in the fact that it was three or four days before chance led to the discovery of the corpse abandoned by Louis Clermont and Cuchillo.

It might have remained there still longer—long enough for there to have been nothing found but a skeleton and some pieces of woolen cloth—if the sheep, enclosed within the corral, urged by hunger (their guardians had completely forgotten them, in the haste of their flight), had not forcibly broken down the feeble barrier which imprisoned them, and dispersed themselves over the *campo*.

Now, every animal on the campo, sheep, cow, bull, or horse, bears the mark of the master to whom he belongs, the *gauchos* being simply the savage servants of some farmer or European capitalist.

Abandoned to themselves, the sheep mixed with other droves, and their unusual presence attracted the attention of our two heroes' fellow herdsmen.

"Some accident must have occurred!" said the first *gaucho*, who noticed the advent of the new sheep; and they made their way toward the *corral* in which had happened the events we have just related.

When the first comers arrived on the scene of the tragedy, the body of the marquis was already greatly disfigured. The owls and other birds of prey had eaten out the eyes, and devoured a portion of the features; millions of flies had settled on the gaping wounds in the breast, and the work of total destruction had not only begun, but was in a fair way to completion.

"Who is it?" asked the first three *gauchos*, on seeing the corpse.

"Parbleu!" said the eldest, after a close inspection, "it is Cuchillo; I recognize him perfectly. See, the face is beardless; it has a moustache only . . . Besides, I recognize his belt; and here is his *navaja*. Don't you remember that a screw was missing from the handle?"

"Perfectly well!" answered the youngest of the three. "I recollect it, for I spoke of it to him not more than a fortnight since, when I met him, some little distance east of here."

"Yes, yes," said, in turn, the one who had not yet spoken, "it is, undoubtedly, Cuchillo; I recognize his figure, his features—what there is left of them—his general appearance, and his clothes; there isn't any doubt about it."

"And, as Clermont has fled, abandoning the *corral*, as is proved by the fences being broken by the famished sheep, it must be he who has killed him."

"But they were old friends!"

"That does not prevent a knife thrust."

"That is true."

"However, this is not a case of murder . . . They fought!"

"Right again, friend! for here is blood on his *navaja*."

"*Carajo!* so there is.—He has been the weakest, that is all."

"In a duel with knives someone must succumb! In this case it has been Cuchillo."

"He was a good fellow."

"What must be done?"

"We cannot leave his body a prey to birds and vermin."

"He was a brave and hardy companion, and should repose in Christian ground."

"That is my opinion. Let us take his body to Buenos Ayres."

No sooner said than done. One of the *gauchos* went in chase of a horse, lassoed him and led him back frothing at the mouth, but subdued. They then put a bridle on him, and fastened the partly eaten corpse upon his back, and the funeral *cortege* started for the city, after the *gauchos* had scrupuously collected the few small valuables left by the fugitives, who had carried nothing with them but their supply of cartridges, their guns, revolvers and a small quantity of *yerba*.

The body was carried to the first police station of Buenos Ayres.

"More knife thrusts!" philosophically observed the officer in charge.

They placed the body on a table; the three *gauchos* related how they had discovered it, and returned to the *campo*.

"Still it is necessary to hold an inquest—for form's sake," grumbled the officer, and he sent a report to the superintendent of police, who directed one of his subordinates to conduct the necessary proceedings. This officer soon arrived.

"The first thing to be done is to legally establish the identity," said he, with a wearied air. "Where are the witnesses?"

"Faith! they have gone away. They could not leave their flocks any longer."

"At least they could have signed their declaration."

"They did not know how to write."

"What difference did that make? You could have made out affidavits, to which they could have added their crosses, and all would have been done. Now, it has to be commenced all over again. Where are they? Gone to the devil, doubtless!"

"Oh! all the *gauchos* knew him. We have only to send to the inn, where most of them put up," replied the officer in charge of the station, "to find plenty who will recognize the body."

"That is true. Make all who are there come. Above all seek a certain *Coco*. He is on the police, is a Frenchman, and ought to know this man, who was also French, as is proven by the papers you have taken from his pocket, although they bear no name."

Half an hour later a dozen *gauchos*, surrounded by the police, entered the station, and two of these unhesitatingly declared that the body before them was Cuchillo's, whom they knew well, having seen him many times.

Meanwhile Coco, *the Death's Head*, forewarned, arrived in turn.

"And you," said the officer charged with conducting the inquest, addressing Coco, as he was about to close his report, "do you also recognize him?"

Coco advanced and took a long look at the corpse, carefully examining the face. This lasted so long that the officer, becoming impatient, said:

"Well, did you know Cuchillo?"

"Yes, very well. He was an old friend and companion of mine. For years we were never separated."

"Then you recognize him, don't you?"

Coco threw an oblique glance around him, and finally said:

"Yes!"

"Of course! Here is the report. Sign it, and your companions will do the same."

Coco took the pen offered him and signed his name, which was, they recollected, Vigot. The two other

gauchos made crosses, and the death of *Jean Pruneau, alias* Cuchillo, was officially declared.

"As to the assassin," added the officer, "it was evidently his companion, Louis Clermont, since he has fled."

And all was over.

The police did not even make a formal search for the murderer. If he had stolen animals, it would have been very different; but knife thrusts did not amount to much and dishonored no one. Every one except the police withdrew from the station house, and Coco, *the Death's Head*, regained his inn, muttering to himself:

"The fools!—pretty fellows to be policemen! They couldn't even see that the corpse had been shaved, for the skin, where the beard had been, was white, and not sunburnt like the rest of the face. That is not Cuchillo's body, although it was dressed in his clothes, which contained his knife and papers, and was astonishingly like him. It is the poor devil whom I saw at the corral the other day, and whose resemblance to the *gaucho* struck me at the time. Why have they killed him and passed him off as Cuchillo?" He rubbed his forhead, and resumed: "Here is a mystery which I was not stupid enough to reveal to these fools the police, but which I will discover. There ought to be money to be made out of it. . . . I knew Clermont. He is a sharp rougue. . . . Eh! well, I am as sharp, and I will make them come to terms if it is worth my while."

And Coco, *the Death's Head*, silently rubbed his hands.

END OF PART SECOND.

THIRD PART.

THE FRATRICIDE.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE PLACE.

THE lugubrious sound of the great clock came through the night, dominating the voice of the tempest which was rushing across the open country. The storm came from the west, and brought with it the moaning cries of the ocean it had traversed. It attacked with fury the old walls and the high chimneys of the Chateau of Kandos.

In the language of the peasants "it was a night when one would not shut the door against a wandering cur."

Yet on such a night in the November of 1866, two men braved the forces of the wind and rain, and reached the door of the walled court-yard of the Duke of Kandos.

It was nine o'clock. The doors and shutters were all closed, and the chateau opposed a profound silence to the noise of the tempest.

Twice they had pulled vigorously at the bell, yet, although they could plainly hear its ringing appeal for hospitality to the benighted strangers, no one came.

After waiting for some minutes, the traveler who had already sounded was about to commence a third and more desperate attack upon the ears of the household, when a vague light, and the clatter of wooden shoes on the pavement of the court, proved that some

one had heard the bell, and was coming to open the door.

"At last," grumbled the man, whose hand now released the bell-handle; "I had begun to think we would be left to drown in the downpour of this cursed doorway, which is a well in place of a shelter."

"Hush!" said his companion, "they are coming."

The lock turned with a sinister groan, the bolts rattled, and through the partly opened door, guarded by a chain, appeared the head of an old peasant.

The red light of the lantern he held in the opening lit a face which expressed suspicion and ill humor—suspicion of strangers who arrived at such an hour, and in such weather—ill humor for the unwelcome disturbance, which forced him to quit his warm, dry corner, to which the storm gave added charm, through the contrast it suggested.

The light shone upon the two strangers; they were well clad, except for the assaults of the wind and rain—not as peasants, but as Parisians. One was about middle age; the other older. Both had the intelligent quickness and certainty of look which reveals the training of travel, and the habit of weighing men and circumstances.

"Who are you? What do you want?" asked the peasant, in a gruff voice.

"We were caught in the storm, and lost our way in the darkness."

"Where were you going? I will direct you on your way."

"We can go no further on such a night; we wish to ask hospitality here."

The old peasant recoiled, and made a movement as if about to close the door; but the stranger who had answered his question advanced his foot in such a manner that the door was forced back as far as the chain would permit.

"Oh! Oh!" cried the *concierge*, who merited the name of Cerberus, "hospitality? You wish to stay all night at the chateau?"

"Certainly; this is not fit weather for a longer walk. Why, *you* are nearly wet to the skin since you came to open to us!"

"But I do not know you. You can go the village; there you will find an inn."

"It is too far! We can not get to the village. We are as cold and wet as if we had been in the river."

"The Chateau of Kandos is not an inn!" replied the peasant, with a tone of determined denial.

"True: but do you shut out your fellow christians in such weather? If the 'Little Fairy' knew you had refused us entrance——"

"The 'Little Fairy,'" repeated Cerberus, in a softened tone.

"Yes—consult her, and you will learn a different lesson."

"Yes; I know," grumbled the old peasant, between his teeth.

"If she hears, to-morrow, that you closed the door against two lost travelers—what will you say?"

Cerberus scratched his head—through his night-cap—and at last found an idea. "I will tell her you are here; she can do as she pleases." Then he closed the door with such violence that the traveler in the doorway was thrown back in the muddy path. He quickly recovered his footing, and called after the departing light:

"Hello! man! if you leave us here I will ring this bell until all the house is aroused? The old brute," he added, in a lower tone.

"Take care!" said his companion, who, until now, had kept silent; "it is imprudent to force an entrance."

"Bah! It is absolutely necessary to enter to-night. *She* must see us in this pitiable state."

The waiting was not long.

The door was thrown wide open. Behind the old peasant appeared the graceful form of a young woman, whose features were hidden by the heavy folds of a large shawl, which had hastily been thrown over her head.

"Pardon this waiting, gentlemen," she said, in a low, sweet voice; "it is due to the zeal of old Sylvain for the safety of the house; this prudence makes him pitiless. Enter, you are welcome."

"Thanks, *mademoiselle!*" exclaimed the elder of the travelers. "Excuse this intrusion; we had lost our way, and were too fatigued to go further."

They entered, and the door was closed.

They crossed a wide-paved court-yard, passed the low buildings which served as graneries, and entered the hall of the chateau.

The young woman led the way to a large room, furnished with two beds. A peasant girl was piling the pine cones under and above a large bundle of fagots. The flame was soon flaring out its red light, to welcome and dry the travelers.

"Gentlemen," said the young woman, "this is your shelter for the night. I am sorry it is not already warm, and more comfortable."

"To-morrow, we hope to see you, and present our homage and our thanks," said the younger traveler, who had hitherto been silent.

The "Little Fairy" bowed, and disappeared.

The peasant girl lit two candles, and then retired with old Sylvain, whose morose manner proved his disapprobation of this hospitable arrangement.

The two men approached the fire, before which their clothing began to give out a thick mist.

The elder of the two strangers rubbed his hands joyously.

His companion had a disturbed, pre-occupied air.

Suddenly the door opened, and the young servant entered, accompanied by an old woman carrying upon a large salver the elements of a cold supper, which had been hastily collected: a roast chicken, a large loaf of white bread, cheese, fruit, and two bottles of the white wine of the province.

Our travelers watched these preparations with satisfied eyes. As the servants left the room—

"This is charming," said the elder; "the 'Little Fairy' merits her name. What a thoughtful atten-

tion; come, seat yourself! Face to the table, and back to the fire! Now we are really in the place, it will be hard to dislodge us."

"Who can tell how it will end?"

"I can tell; I say, success is sure."

"It commences well."

"It will finish better. Ah! ah! Monsieur Sylvain—my old wolf—I remember your open mouth and your yellow fangs. And you, my friend, *you* must also remember: it was Sylvain who was your custodian when the duke locked you up, after the jolly thrashing you also must remember." And Louis Clermont laughed silently.

"I do not understand your coolness," murmured Cuchillo, whom the reader has already recognized.

"It comes from the certainty of success," replied Louis Clermont, bending across the table, and speaking in a low tone. "We have the game in our hands. The cards are well selected. You see we are armed to the teeth with proofs. There is not a point uncovered. For ten months we have studied our *rôles*. We have collected the necessary information. We have all the evidence that could be required to prove your personality. It is impossible to surprise or confuse us unless we lose our presence of mind." With a cynical smile, he continued:

"I think Providence protects us. It has placed the 'Little Fairy' between us and the old duke. The blind old man sees with her eyes. You must admit that I have well arranged our opening scene. This storm is my theatrical property. The name of the 'Little Fairy' was the open sesame of the castle-door; as it will be of the arms of your father, Monsieur le Marquis."

Between the glasses of wine and the mouthfuls of food this confidential talk went on. When the repast had ended, Louis Clermont commenced taking off his steaming garments, as he said:

"A good night's sleep, and we will be fresh and ready for to-morrow s trial. The victory is sure."

CHAPTER II.

THE "LITTLE FAIRY."

THE following day, at eleven o'clock in the morning, the young servant we have already seen, entered the mistress's sitting-room.

"Mademoiselle," she said, "the two strangers who came last night wish to see you."

"Have you given them breakfast, as I ordered?"

"Yes, mademoiselle," and now they wish to take leave of you."

"Show them in."

The sitting-room, although of an extreme simplicity, was attractive in its revelation of the exquisite taste of its occupant. The antique furniture seemed to have caught a certain freshness and grace in reflecting the youthful charm of the "Little Fairy."

Upon the chimney-piece, and in the windows, there were immense bouquets of fresh flowers. They were the only luxury of the *salon*, unless we add the queer old triangular piano, and the rich, but much darned, curtains of antique lace. As the travelers entered, the "Little Fairy" arose from her seat in front of a highly ornamented old *secretaire*—its glistening handles and shining plaques of brass were additional proofs of the care given to the apartment. She bowed and smiled an amiable welcome, while motioning them to comfortable, easy chairs near the bright, snapping fire, which perfumed the air with the resinous odor of glittering pine-cones.

The two men glanced rapidly about, and appeared, particularly Cuchillo, to appreciate the charm of the room, brightened as it was by the presence of the beautiful little woman who did the honors of the house

to its guests. She was simply dressed in black, but the very simplicity of her toilet gave new value to the beauty of the exquisite complexion, the golden hair, the scarlet lips, and the deep blue of the soft, clear eyes.

It was Jeanne, the Mademoiselle de Leon—who has already been presented to the readers as the wife of Cuchillo, bearing the title of Duchess of Kandos.

Cuchillo, who had scarcely seen her the previous evening, when her lovely head and slight, small figure were hidden beneath the heavy shawl she had caught about her before crossing the court-yard, could not hide the impression which her beauty, her grace, and the rare perfume of purity, to which he was so unaccustomed, produced upon his violent, yet sincere and impressionable nature.

This flattering homage, so unconsciously expressed, did not escape the perception of the young girl—younger through the innocence and simplicity of her character than in years; for at that time Jeanne was twenty-six, although she did not seem twenty. A certain indescribable sympathy attracted Cuchillo. He, too, was simply dressed in deep mourning, which gave an elegance to the form and carriage already modified by his residence in Europe; and his life in a different world from that of *gauchos* and criminals—so long his early associates. His hair and heard were carefully trimmed, the silky, drooping mustache hid the menacing expression of his mouth; and gave to his face a virile beauty, softened by the melancholy expression of his large, dark eyes.

"Mademoiselle," said Louis Clermont, in the tone of the simple, but good old professor, his *rôle* in the comedy which he had prepared, "we could not depart without bringing you our homage and our thanks for the kindness and hospitality you have shown us."

"Gentlemen," said Jeanne, seating herself near the fire, and opposite to her guests, where the lovely little feet, that crept in and out beneath her robe, fascinated the gaze of Cuchillo, "nothing that we have done merits thanks; hospitality is a duty, an obligation we

are under to strangers ; besides, I am only an agent of the Duke of Kandos. It was in his name I bade you welcome last night. I am sorry I cannot present you to him. But he is a sorrowful, blind, and aged sufferer, who prefers solitude."

She stopped, abruptly, and softly sighed—the depths of the beautiful eyes expressed a profound pity.

"Mademoiselle!" exclaimed Louis Clermont, "is it, indeed, Mademoiselle de Leon to whom I have the honor to speak."

"Yes, monsieur," replied Jeanne.

"Oh, we know," continued the old convict, "the admirable part you play in this house ; the devotion you have manifested to a blind, infirm old man, to a child whose mother you have replaced. A devotion all the more charming because of your youth, which would indicate you as an elder sister of your pupil. We know, also, how good, how charitable you are to the poor—to the unhappy."

Jeanne slightly blushed at this praise—at these allusions to the unhappiness which blighted the family of the duke, who had trusted to her care the grandchild abandoned by her parents. Her reply was more to Cuchillo than to his companion, who inspired her with an ill-concealed antipathy.

"If I am charitable and thoughtful of the poor and unhappy," she said, softly, "it is because I remember that I have suffered. I have been, and am yet, poor. I do not forget the past—that is all the merit I can claim."

She stopped with the air of a person who terminates an interview. But a rapid glance from Louis Clermont decided Cuchillo to speak. His manner was slightly embarrassed, and his voice trembled.

"Mademoiselle ; I know that you are an orphan : and no one can understand better than I what it is to be deprived of the joys, the sweet cares, of home. Nothing can compensate for the loss of family ties—if they are broken by death—or by faults one vainly regrets."

"Monsieurs," said Jeanne, in a cold tone, "I was

ignorant of the fact that my history—that my life had any interest for strangers, or that it was known outside the circle of my friends."

Evidently she was displeased that strangers should dare to enter this sacred circle without her permission.

"You are more widely known than you think," replied Cuchillo, with warmth. "We know that for two years you have taken the place of one whose duty it was to be here. You have surrounded the duke with the most tender care; you have been the light of the blind eyes; you have given joy to his wounded heart; you have been a friend, a sister—a mother to Mademoiselle de Kandos, whose situation is clouded with sadness and grief. You are loved and admired throughout the neighborhood. And, personally, I should thank you for your goodness to the duke, to his granddaughter—to—me!"

Jeanne was standing, as she said:

"Monsieur, I am ignorant of any title which gives you the right to address thanks to me for that which only regards the Duke of Kandos, his grand-daughter, and myself."

The two men had also risen. Cuchillo approached Jeanne. He was extremely pale, a nervous trembling agitated his person. The effort of speech seemed to strangle him.

"The animal! he is frightened," thought Louis Clermont.

"Mademoiselle!" at last murmured Cuchillo. "I understand that my thanks offend you. I know you and your goodness, but you do not know me. My name will be my excuse."

He caught his breath, and added, in an almost suffocated voice:

"I am the Marquis Paul de Kandos."

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH FREDERICK LEMAITRE IS OUTDONE.

MADEMOISELLE DE LEON became very pale; she leaned on the back of the chair as if she was about to faint. Her eyes were fixed with a strange expression upon the person who had just declared himself the son of the old duke.

As if yielding to an irresistible impulse, she advanced a few steps, and regarded him closely.

Cuchillo was livid. He had taken a decisive step. He could not recoil from the ground upon which he stood. Yet he could not understand the extraordinary emotion of the young girl!

Why did she look at him thus?

His troubled conscience made him expect and fear everything.

He neither dared to speak nor to continue to look at Mademoiselle de Leon. If his trouble had not been so complete, he would have been reassured. For he could have seen that when the first surprise had passed the girl's face had an expression of lively sympathy, of profound pity—in which, however, there was nothing to humiliate him.

"Then"—at last murmured Jeanne—"you are the marquis, you are Paul de Kandos." She blushed as she spoke. Her accent left no doubt of her meaning. She believed him.

This restored Cuchillo's courage—he felt that success was certain. The prize was in his hands. It was the triumph of audacity!

Louis Clermont, who had combined the order and the march of events, kept a little to one side, hat in hand, ready to pull out his handkerchief and wipe his

eyes when the scene became sufficiently touching—as he hoped it would.

He perfectly understood Mademoiselle de Leon; he had no uneasiness in regard to her sentiments. But he read the heart of his comrade as if it was an open book, and he feared that his feebleness would not permit him to rise to the hight of the occasion.

"Mademoiselle," again began Cuchillo, decided to push his advantage to the end, "I comprehend your astonishment, and the horror with which I doubtless inspire you. I know that my life has been one long series of follies, unworthy of my name, unworthy of a man of heart. I have seen my faults—when it was too late to correct them—I know how culpable has been my conduct to the duke—to my father! Conduct which I can only lament and deplore——"

"Oh! monsieur," interrupted Jeanne. But Cuchillo rapidly continued:

"Do not think, mademoiselle, that I came here led by false hopes; I have none. I only wished to see once more the home where I was born, to breathe the same air with the father who banished me, with the child I abandoned. I wished, above all, to thank you for having replaced me with those who are so dear to me, for taking up so nobly the duties I disregarded—the position which I can no longer consider mine. I only wished to see you, to bless you. And now, mademoiselle, adieu! you will never see me again. Long ago, my faults condemned me; to-day it is my conscience which banishes me from this lost paradise!"

"Come, come!" thought Louis Clermont, "that is not bad. The only trouble was the embarassment of a first debut. But he has talent."

Cuchillo had made a movement toward the door.

"Monsieur le Marquis, stay!" cried the young girl, with a burst of generous feeling. "Stay; do not leave like this—you cannot; I beg of you——"

Cuchillo stopped.

Mademoiselle de Leon regarded him with entreaty.

The beauty; the warmth of her devotion; the lovely face, to which the feeling of the heart gave new expression; the hands extended; all touched his passionate nature, and awakened vague instincts, which he could not analyze or understand at that moment.

By a sincere and natural movement, he sprang forward and seized her hands, saying:

"You do not despise me? You do not hate me?"

At the moment he was frank. Without knowing why, he ardently desired that this charming girl, who appeared to him so pure—so noble, should not regard him with contempt nor hatred.

"*Carajo!*" thought Louis Clermont; "it is perfect, admirable! What a magnificent rascal. What an actor! Frederick Lemaitre is a mere tyro beside him."

"No, Monsieur le Marquis," replied Jeanne, leaving her hands in Cuchillo's, "I understand—and, I wish to save you!"

Louis Clermont drew out his handkerchief, and vigorously rubbed his eye-lids. Judging that the moment for sympathy had come, he drawled, in a lachrymose voice:

"Excuse me!—I believe—God forgive me!—that I am crying like a baby."

No one paid any attention to his play, nor appeared, even, to hear his sympathetic phrase.

"To save me?" repeated Cuchillo, bitterly.

He had thoroughly entered his *rôle*. He was the person he represented, which was all the more natural because what he said could apply to one whose own life had been as miserable, and, in some things, more culpable than that of Paul de Kandos.

"Yes!" Jeanne replied, in a voice which, though trembling, was evidently full of resolution.

"It is impossible; it is too late!"

"No, Monsieur le Marquis; it is never too late! Besides, I am called the 'Little Fairy.' Let me merit the name."

With a modest gesture, she loosened her hands from his clasp—blushing—as if she had forgotten, until now,

that he held them. Moving back to her chair, she said:

"Be seated, if you please, and listen to me."

Cuchillo obeyed.

She resumed her seat. She did not look at him, but the beating of her heart was revealed in the trembling of the little *fichu* which was crossed over her breast.

"Monsieur le Marquis," she commenced, with a visible effort, "I have desired, dreamed of, and waited for this day ever since I came to the chateau—ever since your father received and welcomed me here.

"I know your life," she added, after a moment's hesitation; "at least its principal events. An infirm old man has told me the secret of his grief, his anger. Then, too, I have discovered things which were not told me. I have been the friend, the elder sister, of your daughter, whom I love dearly. Oh! you must, you shall know Annette!"

Cuchillo's head dropped, but Louis Clermont could see that he was very pale.

"Yes," continued Jeanne, "for two years I have wished that the son might return to his father—and the father to the daughter who has grown up under the shadow of unmerited grief. I did not dare write to you. I was ignorant of your thoughts, your feelings."

She looked up, and, meeting Cuchillo's look, blushed deeply.

He exclaimed:

"I understand your suspicion—your scorn!"

"Monsieur le Marquis, I have never scorned you; no, never! I have grieved for you, and with you, for I am sure you have suffered terribly. I have known your father; and I have thought that if he had treated you more leniently, you would have acted differently. Besides, your marriage——"

She stopped to conceal her emotion. Cuchillo's eyes were fastened upon her; but, without regarding him, she continued:

"Your marriage was an insurmountable obstacle to your reconciliation with the duke."

"Yes: I know."

"Now, you—are alone——"

Cuchillo shook like one in an ague-fit. Without looking at him, she saw his trouble.

"Oh! *her* death was horrible! I comprehend your anguish at that memory—for you—loved her!"

"Yes," murmured Cuchillo, in a stifled voice.

Mademoiselle de Leon had lifted her eyes, and looked him in the face, when she asked the question. As he answered, her eye-lids drooped until the long lashes seemed to rest upon her cheeks.

For a few moments they were both absorbed in ideas and sensations hitherto unknown.

At length, looking at him courageously, Jeanne said:

"They say she was beautiful—absolutely beautiful. Pardon me for having touched a wound which bleeds; it was that I might say to you that I believe your father will forgive you. He will now think only of his son—of the father of his grand-daughter."

"You believe this possible?" said Cuchillo, resuming his *rôle.*

"Yes; I believe—and I also wish it," she added, with a charmingly resolute air.

"Oh! mademoiselle!" cried Cuchillo, "I shall never know how to thank you—how to sufficiently bless the day when I found you here. You will be—you *are*—my good angel."

He had risen and approached her—but only saying: "Wait!" she quitted the room, leaving the two men there.

When the sound of her steps upon the floor of the corridor were lost, Louis Clermont put his handkerchief, perfectly dry, in his pocket, and taking his comrade's arm whispered: "We are wrapped in cotton. Well—you will never doubt the ability of *papa* in the preparation of the scene of a family reconciliation." Cuchillo looking at him with newly wakened feelings of anger and disgust, disengaged his arm. His visage marked with vice, the mocking tone charged with cynicism, was horrible after the sensations caused by

the words, the look, of the young girl who had introduced him to a world into which he had never before penetrated.

"Leave me," he said, as he shook himself free. "Your emotion was sublime. I have seen nothing better in that branch of art."

"It was sincere."

"Ah, well! It is the first time sincerity has served us. You are in a safe path, but be careful, do not lose your wits."

CHAPTER IV.

THE DAUGHTER OF MARIQUITA.

CUCHILLO turned his back to his companion and walked to the fireplace.

Louis Clermont hoisted his shoulders, as an indulgent master who accepts the work of his pupil, condoning the faults, and directed his steps and his attention to the *secretaire* which Jeanne had closed at the moment the two companions were admitted.

The intelligent bandit had already made an inventory of the room, and only this piece of furniture interested him.

The key was in the lock.

He advanced his hand as if to open it, but hastily checking himself, he looked closely at the back with the quick perception of a master machinist.

"What are you doing there, Clermont?" asked Cuchillo.

"Hush! Monsieur le Marquis. We should be sure of absolute solitude when real names are used. Do not forget, I beg of you, that I am Bernard, the old professor who saved your life, and who follows you like a faithful dog."

"Well, then, Monsieur Bernard, what do you find there which deserves such attention?"

"You can see very well, Monsieur le Marquis. I have

an idea that this *secretaire* holds the little secrets of Mademoiselle de Léon."

"What is that to us?"

"What is that to us? Much! Knowledge is useful, and secrets are moral thumb-screws. Besides, I like to know thoroughly all the actors who belong to my company. One plays better——"

Cuchillo sprang forward and seized Louis Clermont's arm. He said, in a low voice, full of anger:

"Leave that! I forbid you to touch it."

A slight noise of steps in the corridor interrupted the beginning of a quarrel.

The two comedians returned to their places.

"Do not forget," said Louis Clermont, in a whisper, "this room belonged to the suite of the duchess when she was living—your mother—you must make a point of that fact."

The false marquis had no time for reply. The door opened. Jeanne returned accompanied by a young girl scarcely sixteen years of age. Remarkably pretty, the child was singularly striking in appearance from the strangeness of the type, from the shining rolls of silky black hair, the large almond shaped eyes with their changing color, and the pallor of her complexion.

To Cuchillo her appearance was a violent shock. This young girl, almost a child, evoked the past. He saw with extreme distinctness the face she recalled, although the resemblance was rather an impression than an actual likeness. It was the Creole type, modified by a new race mixture, and by the calm, regular life of a girl brought up carefully in the country.

Yet she made Cuchillo think of Mariquita, through that faint likeness which constitutes the outline portraiture of family resemblance.

At the first glance Cuchillo knew she was the daughter of Mariquita and of Paul de Kandos. The recollection of the woman who had died for her fidelity to him, mixed itself with the criminal side of the situation, thus exacting fresh audacity in the *rôle* he was playing.

This new complication caused him unexpected trouble; and an indescribable emotion of uneasiness and surprise.

Jeanne took the girl's hand and led her to Cuchillo. "Monsieur le Marquis, I present to you Mademoiselle de Kandos—but I see you have already recognized her. Annette, this is your father!"

The child did not resist the gentle force which pushed her toward the escaped convict. But although visibly agitated, there was more of fearful curiosity, of surprise, of vague interrogation in her manner than of delight. This reception, so different from that of Mademoiselle de Léon, added to Cuchillo's uneasiness an absolute emotion of fear.

The child was in deep mourning.

He forgot that it was for his mother. In the hallucination of that troubled meeting he imagined it was for her father; for the Paul de Kandos whose blood stained his hands, whom he seemed to hear again, exclaim this word: "Assassin!"

He trembled and would have fallen. But Louis Clermont, seeing that his accomplice was about to fail in the very moment of success—to sink beneath the crowning wave of the tide which was swelling to the flood of fortune, came to his assistance.

"My dear marquis, I understand your motive—at sight of your daughter, I have felt a similar joy and grief. I can read the feeling of your heart." He threw his arm around Cuchillo to sustain him, whispering in his ear—"The devil! you will ruin all! speak to the child. Embrace her!"

The situation was too grave to permit weakness. Cushillo conquered his sentiments. Following the impulse thus given he caught Annette in his arms.

He kisses her forehead; but the tears that had gathered in his moment of weakness, of distress, fell upon the cheeks of the young girl.

This sincere emotion once again saved the situation. In embracing the child Cuchillo thought of her mother. Her mother for whom he too wore mourning, not a

mere outward form, "an inky cloak" of ceremony, but the memory of the heart.

This confusion of tender sentiments, with horrible things, caused such an access of nervous sensibility, that both Jeanne and Annette thought it the expression of regret for the past—the cry of paternity.

"Saved, thank God!" said Louis Clermont; "twice his stupidity has recovered us a lost success. It makes one believe in Providence. But what a sweat it gave me! Thunder and lightning! what a sweat!" Then he rubbed his face vigorously with his handkerchief, saying to himself: "This helps—it gives a touch of nature to the picture."

When Annette felt on her cheek the hot tears of her father she threw her head back and looked at him. She too felt tears gathering, but with an effort of will she regained her self-control. This look, more sympathetic than that she had before given Cuchillo, embarrassed him more than her coldness. He could only murmur in broken words:

"My—my dear—child—I have indeed been culpable towards you—thus—you look upon me as a stranger. True we have never met since you were an infant—but it has not been altogether my fault. Life has strange necessities." He stopped—the child intimidated him a hundred times more than did Jeanne. Happily Jeanne came to his relief. The tears, the embarrassment of the marquis touched her deeply. She thought she read in them the anguish of an awakened conscience.

"Monsieur le Marquis. After thus meeting you must not leave your daughter. You have known only the griefs of paternity: you must accustom yourself now to the joys it gives." She caught in her little hand the united hands of Cuchillo and Annette as she added: "And this is not all. I have promised that you shall find again that which you have lost. I have only kept the half of my promise. Annette will assist me to accomplish the whole. She will bring together two hearts which suffer from this separation. But

first I must see that you are definitely installed in this home, which is yours. And your friend ?"

"Bernard," said Cuchillo, "is in truth a friend. I owe him my life."

"Oh ! monsieur !" interrupted quickly Louis Clermont with an air of startled modesty. "Do not speak of that. I am overpaid for any little service I have ever rendered you, in seeing you at last attain the happiness you merit."

"Madamoiselle," recommenced the false marquis—"this room belonged to the apartment of my mother, who, unfortunately, I can scarcely remember."

"That recollection proves, monsieur le marquis, that you at heart have the memory of the affections. This room was the morning room of the duchess."

"And the chamber above this was mine in my infancy, childhood and youth. I have need of these souvenirs. Can I not rest for some hours in that friendly chamber ?"

"Assuredly !" Madamoiselle de Leon replied with emphasis. "It has always been closed since you left home. The duke never wished it occupied by strangers. You will find it as you left it."

"Well, I will install myself there temporarily."

"Say definitely, monsieur. Annette, your father will not leave you ?"

"O! I hope"—murmured the young girl.

"That will depend on you, my child ;" added Jeanne smiling—"the duke never refuses your requests."

"Nor yours," replied Annette, "for I do not know which of us is the favorite."

"Then together we will go to him."

"Permit me to ask another favor ;" said Cuchillo, who was anxious to terminate this scene, that he might have time to recover his coolness and arrange for the interview he foresaw.

"You must command, not ask, in this house, monsieur. It is my duty to study the wishes of the family, of all who bear the Kandos name."

In saying these words she put an arm about Annette, who clung to her affectionately. The contrast in this

appearance gave added grace and beauty to the two girls. One would have said two charming sisters. Cuchillo bowed with unstudied respect as he said: "Communicating with my room was another, which used to be occupied by my preceptor. Can you so arrange that my excellent Bernard will be near me. He came with me from America; and until he finds some position I would wish——"

"There is nothing easier!" interrupted the Little Fairy. "If you will come with me, gentlemen, we will arrange all that."

She detached herself from Annette, who made a step forward.

"For a little while, Annette—my child!"—and for the second time Cuchillo pressed his lips, which were burning and dry, upon the forehead of Annette.

"For a little while," repeated, in an indistinct voice, the young girl.

Jeanne turned as she opened the door.

"Wait for me, Annette. We must see your grandfather together—but first I have something to say to you."

"Lucky dog!" whispered Louis Clermont to Cuchillo—"I am content with you—you scamp: you have bamboozled the Fairy;—you have bamboozled the child."

CHAPTER V.

THE CONSPIRACY OF JEANNE AND ANNETTE.

PENSIVE and thoughtful, Annette was in the same position when Jeanne returned to the little *salon.*

"Annette, my dear child, has this great, this unexpected happiness turned you to a statue?"

"What has it done to you? Why are you so disturbed?"

Jeanne blushed as she said:

"Who would not be agitated in my position? In

the house of my father's old friend, treated by the duke as if I was his daughter—to-day realizes a hope and a dream. If I can reconcile a father to his son, and give to you your father, Annette !"

"But can you, Jeanne? Will grandpapa——?"

"Yes, Annette, with your help. I understand your hesitation—your fears, my child—and I cannot reproach you for your distrust. Your father is a stranger to you, and this stranger makes all rights disappear before his right as your father. It is that which frightens you. But remember, Annette, what he has suffered. His emotion, his tears, proved what memories, what affection, was awakened by meeting you?"

"And my mother, whom he abandoned?"

Jeanne hesitated. It was impossible to tell the child the truth in regard to her mother.

Annette knew only that her mother was a great artist, a *prima donna*. To the girl's imagination, that was a crown. She attributed his separation from her mother to the prejudice of the old duke, to pride of rank, and with the surface logic of a child, added the wrongs of her mother to the sins of the father, who she believed had deserted both her mother and herself.

"He loved your mother, Annette," sighed Jeanne. "Besides, my dear child, when you are older you will judge differently—without injustice. You will know then that blame is not to one alone—your mother's also. Believe me, Annette !" she added, impetuously, "the marquis loved your mother, he loved her always."

This affirmation appeared to soften the young girl.

"Now," recommenced Jeanne, "he is here—he should stay. It is his home—you are his daughter. It is your duty, as it will be your happiness, to bring about a reconciliation between him and your grandfather."

Without a word Annette placed her hand in that of Jeanne.

A few minutes sufficed for Jeanne to explain the method of their joint attack, and together they sought the duke.

When the two girls entered the apartment, where

the monotonous existence of the duke passed since he became blind, the old man was seated in an easy chair near a large square table, before the fire. On the opposite side of the table, Sylvain bent over the wide-spread page of the *Gazette de France*, reading aloud in a high voice, dragging at each word to which he was unaccustomed. He read with the slowness which the peasant puts in all his work, and it was a rare thing for him to finish the reading of one number during the day. As neither servant nor master would consent to skip a number, there was quite a collection of unopened copies upon the table. Thus, the two old men were usually three months behind the issue at the close of the year; and, in fact, the number with which they were busy this cold day in November was dated August 11th.

The Duke of Kankos was over seventy years of age. Tall, spare, and bony, the immobility of his eyes gave to his long visage, without beard, and crowned by thick, white hair, a solemnity and dignity which accorded with his ascetic, methodic, yet narrowly upright and sincere character.

As the door opened, with that fineness and quickness of perception peculiar to the blind, he exclaimed:

"Ah! here are my little girls!"

"Yes, grandpapa, we are here," said Annette, hastening to embrace him.

Sylvain arose as they entered. Laying down the journal, he asked:

"Shall I go, *Monsieur le duc?*"

"That depends," said the duke. "If my little girls cannot stay we will continue. The discussion in the *Chambre des Deputes* is very interesting. But if the children remain, you can go."

"We will remain," said Jeanne.

Sylvain bowed, and went out.

"Yes, grandpapa, we will stay; we have a secret to tell you."

"Oh, ho!" said the old man, with the joyous tone of a child. "A secret to tell me? Speak, little girls. From you I expect sweet words, and good news."

CHAPTER VI.

WOMAN'S POWER.

THERE was a short interval of silence.

"Well?" said the old man, suddenly changing to an urgent tone and air, "What is it? Your hands are cold, Annette, and yours, Jeanne, are feverish. Why are you both silent? What is there so extraordinary?"

"*Monsieur le duc*," said Jeanne, "it is—it is of Monsieur le Marquis, of your son, that we would speak."

The duke dropped the hands he held with a gesture of irritation.

"Some bad news, then. From him—of him I expect nothing else."

"Grandpapa!" interrupted Annette, "he is my father!"

With a more restrained tone, the duke said:

"You know his name is forbidden here."

"He is ill," said Annette, softly.

"Very ill," insisted Jeanne.

His expression changed, yet they could see that he struggled against the feeling which agitated him. At last he asked:

"Is he dangerously ill?"

"Will you forgive his fault—will you pardon him?" answered Jeanne.

Without seeming to hear Jeanne, the duke repeated: "Dangerously ill! Is his life menaced?"

"Ah! you love him yet, grandpapa?" cried Annette, throwing her arms around the old man's neck.

"It is a deception—an unworthy deception," said he. "You have seen him, and he has charged you thus. Leave me; I will not listen."

"*Monsieur le duc*," said Jeanne with warmth, "in

spite of your stoicism you suffer from this long separation. You love your son. Permit me to be frank, to be sincere; afterwards you can dismiss me from your home, if you choose; but I shall at least have done my duty. You, too, have faults to regret. You have been severe, unforgiving. Your son's character was impressionable; he had a warm heart, but a feeble will. His greatest misfortune was the loss of his mother. By gentleness and love he could have been won to repentance for his early faults. But you threw him from his safeguard of home into the temptations of life, without a friend or a guide."

"Do you know what he had done?" asked the duke in a bitter and menacing tone.

"I know," said Jeanne, "that he is your son, that he is the father of Annette, who has no mother, and who begs forgiveness for *him*."

The old man trembled. He extended his arms to clasp his grand-daughter, saying, in a softened voice:

"Is it true, my child? Do you wish to recall him?"

"Yes, grandpapa."

The duke turned his sightless eyes to Jeanne, murmuring:

"Is he penitent?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Jeanne, "he has repented—he has suffered——"

"He hopes, perhaps, after having ruined his life through his faults, to find here ease; to repose in idleness?"

"*Non, monsieur le duc.* If you had seen him as I have——"

"Then he is here?" asked the trembling old man, with contracted lips and frowning brows.

"Yes, he is here. He has seen his daughter. This man, transformed by misfortune, by suffering, wept bitter tears when for the first time he touched Annette's brow with the kiss of a father."

"He wishes to take her from me!" exclaimed the duke, in new terror—"but he has forfeited his right."

"Such rights are never lost, grandpapa—you your-

self have told me that often. Grandpapa, he is my father."

"Worthless son! worthless father!" said the headstrong, unforgiving old man.

"No! no!" repeated Jeanne. "A repentant son will make a devoted father. Believe me! you love him. The affection of a parent is rooted in the heart. It cannot be torn out. You love him as he loves Annette! You cannot separate the father from his child!"

"That is a menace?"

"No, monsieur le duc; it is a warning."

"Annette," he cried, turning to his granddaughter, "do you love him better than you love me?"

"O, no! grandpapa, not so well, not at all as I love thee!"

There was an incontestible tone of sincerity in the words of the young girl which frightened Jeanne; but it gained their cause.

"And you, Annette, you! his daughter, ask me to pardon him?"

"Yes, grandpapa!"

"Well," he said, slowly, "you have won. I cede to your wish. If he deceives me again, may God pardon you for this insistence which I could not resist. I am too old, too feeble to resist you two. Let him come."

"I go to bring him," said Annette, who embraced her grandfather and hurriedly left the room.

The trembling old man turned toward Jeanne, saying, in a reproachful tone:

"You forced this. If you had not brought Annette I could have refused."

"Yes, monsieur le duc, I know."

"Before her I could not say all. I should have extinguished in her heart all respect for family ties."

"Monsieur le duc, I knew it was the only way to conquest. I brought Annette for that reason. If you are angry, I only am in fault, not your son. It was my thought, not his. I occupied his place here, with

you—with his daughter. I have restored to him his place in this house. It was my duty."

The duke hesitated an instant, then said, with a voice full of emotion:

"I know your heart, Jeanne. You are true and devoted; your thought, wish, and intention are pure. You have been a mother to Annette. Besides, you have only hastened what must come. To-day he comes with my permission; to-morrow he would not need to ask it. My days are counted; I no longer exist even, for I am powerless."

"No, no! not powerless, for you can give happiness to others!"

The door opened suddenly. Annette entered with Cuchillo, saying, in a low voice, to her grandfather: "He is here."

CHAPTER VII.

ALL DECEIVED BUT ONE.

AT these words the old man arose from the chair. He could permit two women, who loved him, to see his weakness, his anguish, but not this rebellious son. For *him*, the strength and dignity of the paternal authority must be preserved. He would gladly have opened his arms, as he did his house, to the returned prodigal; but he forbid himself this joy. He armed himself with the dignity and severity which, according to his narrow conception, were the proper components of the ideal chief, of the head of the house of Kandos.

Cuchillo was infinitely troubled. His prepossessions were all against this old man whose conduct to his son he thought hard and unmerciful. He had seen his own infamy in the face of the child of the man he had killed. In the hesitating, anxious look which searched his soul, as if to find there a father whose outward expression she had not recognized. But

here, in the presence of a blind old man, overwhelmed with sorrows and burdened with age and its accompanying infirmities, the shame of the deception, of the horrible lie he was acting, debased him in his own eyes. The criminal was beginning to feel the influence of the virtues which, in their very truthfulness, blinded the two girls and the old man to his true character. But the shame in his soul had not awakened the repentance which reforms and purifies. It was as yet only a spur to resistance, a reminder of the situation. He said, with hesitating effort: "Monsieur le duc—my father——"

"My son," the duke interrupted, with an icy air—"you need not thank me—only your daughter and Mademoiselle de Léon. At their entreaty I have consented, not to forget, I cannot do that—but to pardon the past if the future proves that you bring back altogether different sentiments from those which influenced you when you left this house."

"I swear to you," said Cuchillo——

"Annette, Jeanne," pursued the duke, interrupting him, "have promised for you. I have accepted their promises. They are your securities. All I ask of the Judge there"—and he raised his hand with an expression of devout appeal—"is that one day they may not have cause to bitterly regret this belief in you."

Cuchillo trembled, in spite of himself, at these words which had something of prophesy in their accent. He alone could comprehend the profound and terrible truth they unconsciously shadowed.

"I hope," he murmured, "if it depends upon me they shall not regret this trust."

The two girls seemed frozen by this interview—so different from the one they had imagined. It would seem that for an instant all the assistants at this scene had a dim presentiment of the future.

"After this," said the duke, "you will never hear from me any allusion to the faults of the past. A new life is beginning. Let us think of that."

"I wait your orders," replied Cuchillo.

"What do you expect to do?"

"Whatever is useful to you, whatever may please you."

For an instant the duke was silent; then he said, hesitatingly, "I know nothing for which you are fit——"

"Monsieur le duc," cried Jeanne, comprehending that a feminine intervention would arrange the difficulties and soften the contact of these opposite natures, "I can suggest if you will permit——"

"Speak, Jeanne," the duke commanded.

There was a sensation of solace, of comfort, to the two men in the sound of this sweet, womanly voice.

"With Sylvain I have watched your farming interests, monsieur le duc. It has been a little wearisome to me; and it has taken the time which belongs to Annette, whose studies have thus suffered. Beside, Sylvain lacks the qualities which command the obedience of your people. He has zeal, and honesty, but he has neither intelligence nor the *prestige* needed. If your lands were more wisely managed they would double their returns."

"That is true," replied the duke, with some bitterness of tone.

"Sylvain would be better employed in your personal service. In reading to you. He would then be released of labor that overtaxes his age and his ability. He could rest always near you."

"Evidently it would be better."

"Then I beg you to release Sylvain and me from our functions," laughingly she added: "They would give occupation to two men. The time of monsieur le marquis will be fully occupied."

"Are you capable of that?" interrupted the duke, addressing Cuchillo.

"Yes, my father. For two years I farmed in la Plata. With the counsel—under the direction of Mademoiselle de Léon I hope I should be able to convince you of my fitness for work."

"You can try," said the duke. "We will see."

"Monsieur le marquis," asked Jeanne, "could not

your friend, M. Bernard, be of assistance to you under these circumstances?"

"Very useful," replied Cuchillo. "I thank you for the thought for him, and for me."

If Louis Clermont had been present he would have said:

"This goes on wheels."

"Who is your guest—this M. Bernard?" asked the duke, with an air of suspicion.

"An old professor, who went to America to gain his fortune, and who, like many others, found only misery. We have been *gauchos* together. He saved my life."

"How was that?" exclaimed Annette, with the curiosity of a child.

"A bull escaped from the corral. I pursued him with my lasso. But I had thrown it awkwardly, and the shock unhorsed me. The bull turned and gored me in the side. I have the mark there yet."

The two accomplices had arranged this to manage a double explanation of this intimate friendship, and also of the scar left by the *navaja* of Paul de Kandos. Cuchillo had turned pale in pronouncing the words which recalled to him the duel, and the death of the man he was personating.

"And then?" demanded Jeanne, with emotion.

"I was helpless. Another touch of the pointed horns would have opened my breast. Bernard threw himself in front of the enraged animal. Happily he has great coolness as well as courage. He buried his knife in the vital spot near the shoulder, and the bull fell as if struck by lightning."

The duke gave a sigh of relief. Then he said to Jeanne:

"Send for this man and present him to me, and let some one call Sylvain at the same time."

"Monsieur," said the duke, as Cuchillo presented his friend, "you have saved my son's life—you are without employment. The marquis desires to keep you with him, to assist him upon the lands of the estate. My farmers need the impulsion of active, en-

terprising managers. If you wish here is place and opportunity to employ your energy—your intelligence."

"*Monsieur le duc*, I accept with gratitude," humbly replied the cynical old rascal. "My zeal, my strength are at your service, as they have been at the service of the marquis."

"You can arrange your duties with my son and Mademoiselle de Leon. Sylvain, are you here?"

"Yes, *monsieur le duc*," said the old peasant, who now advanced from his position near the door.

Louis Clermont, turning at the call for Sylvain, trembled at the strange look which the old peasant fixed upon him.

"Sylvain," recommenced the duke, "you have recognized already my son?"

"Perfectly! although he is much changed in all these years."

"He will replace you and dear Jeanne in the management of the lands. You will be exclusively attached to my personal service. You will tell our people of—of this happy return. Now, I am a little tired; I wish to be alone. You can stay, Sylvain, I have a word to say to you."

All were about to retire, when an expressive look from Mademoiselle de Leon instructed Cuchillo, who advanced to the duke.

"My father!" he said.

After a moment's hesitation, the old man extended his hand. Cuchillo bowed, and carried it to his lips.

Sylvain was alone with the duke.

"Sylvain, is my son much changed?"

"Yes; *monsieur le duc*."

"But you recognized him?"

"Yes; *monsieur le duc*."

"Then I would recognize him if I could see?"

"Certainly."

"It is astonishing that I do not recognize his voice."

"Nor would I."

"He appears to have suffered much?"

"Yes; he looks older than he is. He is very dark and sunburned."

"I," murmured the father, "see him always as I saw him last."

His head dropped upon his breast, and his eyes were wet.

CHAPTER VIII.

LOUIS CLERMONT'S DESSERT.

THE following morning Mademoiselle de Leon went to Besançon to stay over night with some old friends of his family. To install the marquis and his friend comfortably, she had some purchases to make. The rooms had been vacant for twenty years, and a partial refurnishing was needed. Jeanne was restricted to the absolutely necessary. The duke had said he "would receive the prodigal son, but he would not kill the fatted calf in his honor."

Sylvain had accompanied Jeanne, leaving Mademoiselle de Kandos in attendance upon her grandfather.

Cuchillo employed the day in learning topographical details of which he dared not appear ignorant. He returned late, and much fatigued. Bernard had not wished to take this long walk, and his accomplice, glad to be alone, had not insisted. The duke took only his mid-day meal with the family, so Ursule served the supper of the false marquis and his friend in their apartment. When that was over, the two men were left alone, and their masks were laid aside.

"Have you well employed the day?" asked Clermont.

"Yes, I have walked over the estate until I know it well enough not to blunder over my *recollections*."

"Good! and my time has not been lost. I have a dessert you surely did not expect."

"What?"

"Look at that, you lucky dog," and Louis Clermont drew from his breast-pocket a little portfolio full of closely written sheets of thin parchment paper.

"What is there?" said Cuchillo, impressed.

"Read the top of the first leaf."

Cuchillo took the packet and read.

"JOURNAL OF JEANNE."

"Journal of Jeanne," he repeated. "What does this mean?"

"The name—the writing—you do not guess?"

"Mademoiselle de Leon?"

"Ah! see him!" laughed the convict.

"Who gave you this?"

"No one."

"Where did you find it?"

"Where I was looking."

"That is to say you took it."

"Yes; my nephew."

"Where from?"

"The little secretaire."

"It is an infamy—an abominable piece of rascality. You have dared to force open *her* secretaire?"

"Tush! I have left no trace—no one will suspect. You know for what end I work here."

"What matter—this is useless villainy. Could you not respect the secrets of a young girl—so pure—so noble——"

"And so beautful!" finished the mocking cynic. "How admirably you stick to your *role*, monsieur le marquis. But do you respect her?"

"Profoundly."

"Then why deceive her with lies? Why make her our accomplice?—an unconscious, but very real accomplice—for she has opened to us the doors of this house, and to *you* the arms of the old papa."

"That is all true," replied Cuchillo, with concentrated rage. "What we are doing is sufficiently base without forcing locks, and stealing a girl's sacred thoughts. Replace this—I wish it!"

"*Basta!*" exclaimed Clermont. Then in brief, sardonic sentences he added—"I know what I am doing. All is not so easy as you think. We are menaced.

We have an enemy here—Sylvain. How dangerous I do not yet know. But we have our necks to guard. We have but one friend here to count on—the 'Little Fairy.' We must know where to hold her—how to keep her. Read these pages and then thank me."

"It is a baseness—I cannot!"

"Is it, that you are already in love?"

Cuchillo blushed with anger.

"Read these pages, my good fellow. They will interest you—they all concern the marquis Paul de Kandos—consequently they concern thee. Besides, you can read what I have already read. The *indelicacy* is committed;" he shrugged his shoulders and laughed contemptuously.

"You have read them?"

"Parbleu! yes!"

"They mention Paul de Kandos?"

"They deal altogether with him."

Cuchillo regarded the pages, forgetting his indignation in his interest. If she mentioned Paul de Kandos, he could read—he must read them. He must know what she knew. Now his uneasiness was relative and defined.

"If you had been surprised at this?—If *she* had surprised you?"

"That concerns me. But you must read them and quickly. It is now nine o'clock; at midnight I must replace them. I will leave you until then; when midnight sounds call me, if I do not come."

Cuchillo was alone with Jeanne's sacred thoughts.

The portfolio contained over a hundred pages. It was not a daily recital of events, but a succession of impressions and thoughts. The girl had opened her heart in these pages, which were for herself alone.

Cuchillo read with growing interest. The extracts which we are going to give are those only which touch this history.

CHAPTER IX.

JEANNE'S JOURNAL.

"ALL the world here speak evil of the absent son: yet I cannot understand the sentiment he has inspired in the hearts of those who should have more sympathy for him.

"His father never pronounces his name except with anger.

"His daughter, this lovely little Annette, never speaks of him at all, though I know her thoughts are often of her mother.

"I know he has been much to blame—that he has been guilty of grave faults.

"I should be indifferent to him. I should find him odious.

"Why is it that my thoughts constantly turn to him?

"Why do I feel this constant disposition to excuse, to defend him? although I dare not; not having any right to make such defense, and not even knowing what I could say in his favor.

"Since the infirmity of the duke prevents his directing the affairs of his estate—as Annette is yet too young to be the mistress of the house—it is my duty to recognize the goodness of M. de Kandos, by making myself useful as possible. For all is at odds here, since the chief of the family can no longer exercise his immediate authority.

"The duke has been, and is, the victim of a false education, and of deeply rooted prejudices.

"He has created in his thoughts an ideal head of a family, and he sacrifices himself to his ideal.

"His conduct is not from the dictates of his nature,

for at heart he is kind and good, but from a desire to conform to the model which he has made, and which exists wholly in his will, but not in his affections.

"He is a man to console, to reconcile with life as it is.

"I will try!

"To day, Sylvain conducted me through the unoccupied part of this old barrack, for it is not a chateau, and does not merit the name which is given by the people of the province, to flatter the pride of Kandos.

"In traversing the large *salons*, naked and icy, with Sylvain, who is stupidly honest, and fanatically devoted, we entered a suite of rooms in the second story, which were even colder and more barren of all gaiety or comfort, than all the rest.

"'It is the apartment of the marquis,'—said Sylvain. 'He had these rooms from the time of his mother's illness, before her death, until—his departure.'

"I approached the table, where he had worked.

"I found a few old Latin books, soiled by the hands of the little scholar.

"Upon the last page of one, which was thumbed and stained with ink, I deciphered these words in a school-boy hand:

"'Great heaven! but I am tired—and to-day is the fair.'

"I hid the book in my pocket.

"How weary, and solitary, the child must have been!

"By merely letting the peasants talk, I have hundreds of details of the life the marquis led as child and youth, before the event which decided his departure from under the paternal roof.

"Sylvain drew the picture of that last outburst with regret and compunction.

"Ah! and I understand the revolt against this existence, which would be hardly sufferable to a mature man, absorbed in the daily cares, or the brutal passions of a solitary life.

"Paul de Kandos was born in a prison; and he only saw, in his father, his jailer.

"I am sure I divine his nature—feeble and passionate, impressionable and ardent, a bird of light, brought up in the nest of an owl.

"They say he was a beautiful child—that he is yet one of the handsomest men in France.

"I know now why he won my sympathy from the first;—I have always taken sides with the weak against the strong, with the vanquished, not the victors.

"The more I see of the duke, the better I comprehend the wrongs he has committed, with all the loyalty in the world, against his son.

"Yet I feel for him a lively affection—he himself was the first victim of his narrow beliefs, which are without charity or warmth.

"I have spoken to him of his son.

"I have begged his son's pardon, his recall.

"He was much moved: but resolute to guard the heights of paternal authority.

"He has told me of Paul's marriage. Of all with which he reproached him since he left the Chateau.

"He is a gambler—he has had mistresses—alas, he has never met the woman he should love.

"I read yesterday, the beautiful verses of Musset upon Don Juan; last night I dreamed that this famous Don Juan loved *me*, and that I felt the strength and the devotion to lead him to the *Right*—to draw him from evil with the chains of love.

"I said to myself: He would never abandon me, as he has the others. My tenderness, and truth, would keep him forever.

"Ah, Jeanne, you stupid child—he would not even have looked at you.

"Yet I, too, am pretty: and I have a heart, and a steadfast will.

"Not beautiful, like the woman he married.

"They say she was a miracle of loveliness—the little rope-dancer!

"A blonde must look faded beside one of those

brunettes, with their eyes of velvet, and lips of scarlet.

"She was a wicked woman—she did not love him.

"She left him for another. She abandoned his child, yet he adored her.

"They say he was too easy, too careless, with her—he forgave sins against honor.

"It seems to me that love could not be unforgiving. One could not love who condemned, who refused to pardon the beloved.

"Well: yes—I think if I had been his wife in place of this Mariquita, I would have made him happy and good.

"That which was lacking in his childhood and manhood, was the warmth and tenderness of a loving woman.

"What a great and beautiful thing it is to save a man, to uplift him and make him happy.

"Hush, Jeanne! you are not a little girl.

"You are twenty-five years old.

"It seems to me for a few months past you grow foolishly romantic, mademoiselle?

"Why dream of one you have never seen; whom you will never see?

"Why interest yourself so deeply in a stranger?

"Jeanne, Jeanne! you are a fool.

"He is forty years old—he is married!

"But his wife has deserted him—he is poor and alone!

"I love *him* because of his faults—he is weak—he is lost—and I would give him strength—would bring him *home*.

"Since one must love! this foolish, harmless, pitying love, which is born of the shadows in which it dwells suits my humble position in this world.

"This ideal defends me from other loves, for it has given me that which completes the life of a woman.

"It has given me:—

"LOVE!

"He is free! Mariquita is dead!

"Will he return?

"Will her father forgive him? Mariquita separated them, and now—now—the duke will yield forgiveness.

"My duty is to reunite father and son.

"It is a sacred duty.

"I will do it, cost what it may—loyally, honestly, without thought of self.

"——! He is a widower.

"Adieu to the dream which has lived in my heart so long. I am but the grateful dependent of the duke; the friend, the sister of Annette.

"That is all.

"I know my duty. I dare not love him even in my dreams.

"I will write of him no more."

* * * * * * * * *

(Here was an interval of six months in the journal.)

"I have seen him.

"He came yesterday.

"To-day I have reconciled him with his father.

"I have seen in his eyes, when he kissed his daughter, that he still loves Mariquita.

"He will always love her!

"Ah! Well!

"What a noble, proud face he has, and there are in it traces of suffering, of terrible struggles with life. It is thus I thought I would find him.

"All is now finished for me.

"Jeanne, you are in the house of the Duke of Kandos. The marquis has returned. He has his own—he is rich—he is free—he has no need of thee, Jeanne! Let thy pride keep thee, Jeanne—for the romance is finished."

CHAPTER X.

IN WHICH M. BERNARD ENTERS UPON HIS DUTIES.

WHEN Louis Clermont, as it struck midnight, returned to the chamber in which he had left Cuchillo alone with "Jeanne's Journal," the false marquis had finished reading it.

The journal, as we have said, related the young girl's daily life since her arrival at the duke's, and we have only reproduced a few of the most striking and conclusive passages; those in which her romantic feelings for the absent son of the house were most prominently exhibited.

The reading of it had produced a great effect on the hero of it, or, at least, on him who had assumed the *rôle* and personality of the man thus loved.

He sat there, the manuscript before him, so deeply absorbed, although he had finished reading it some time since, that he did not hear Clermont enter.

"Eh! Well, have you finished?"

Cuchillo shuddered, and gazed at his companion in a stupefied manner—like one just awakened from a sound sleep, and who has some difficulty in realizing the exact state of affairs.

"Yes," said he, in an unsteady voice.

"Have you been asleep?"

"No——I was dreaming."

"You see, I was right to give you that. Now you know the 'Little Fairy,' as if you had made her, and what you must do in order to retain her good will, which is our protection and safeguard. *Carajo!* you beat Louis XVI. What a devotee she is? I, too, have had my successes in my time—when I was young and

had the means. But you, the devil! They make eyes at you when you are old and poor!"

"She does not love me!—it is *the other!*"

"Tut! tut! She has seen *you*, and you please her. But enough has been said. Give me the papers so I can replace them."

"Oh! yes, yes, that she may never suspect——"

"Parbleu!"

The convict hastily seized the leaves, arranged them carefully in thier regular order, counted them over to see that none were missing, and cautiously left the apartment, after having taken off his shoes so as not to alarm the sleeping household.

Cuchillo was unable to close his eyes throughout the whole of this night. Many of the words written by the "Little Fairy" had awakened within him sentiments hitherto unknown, or long since forgotten.

This love, born of a great pity; this woman, who dreamt of saving, of leading back to the path of virtue, by the warmth of her affection, a man whom she knew to be miserable and culpable; this mixture of boldness and modesty, of imagination and reason, of impassioned candor and proud will, all this moved him, and threw him into a new, moral world, and opened to him a life very different from the one he had heretofore led.

Did not what she had said of Paul de Kandos apply to Cuchillo with startling truth?

Ah! if he had only known Jeanne, or some one like her, twenty years sooner, how different life would have been to him whom chance had first thrown into the lowest depths of society, and then, as a logical sequence, into crime!

He had ardently loved Mariquita, but more with his senses and vanity than with his heart.

What a difference between these two women!

Before this frank soul, into whose depths his eyes had plunged, he felt as if in the presence of the perfumes of spring, and at the fountain-head of a purity whose savor charmed yet troubled him.

It was nevertheless true that, after having loved him

in her dreams, she had found, on seeing him, that he conformed to her previous ideas of him.

"I am unworthy of her!" he said to himself, with a sigh.

Did he love her already?

At all events he knew he was loved, and, nine times in ten, one loves because one is loved.

The next day, at an early hour, Mademoiselle de Leon and Sylvain returned from Besançon. They had brought the things destined to embellish and render more comfortable the rooms of the marquis. Jeanne and Annette, happy, like all women, in arranging for the comfort of others, spent the whole morning in touching up and brightening the apartment with all kinds of pretty nothings in a tasteful and artistic manner.

Cuchillo and Louis Clermont had gone out of doors, so as not to obstruct these arrangements. Besides, Cuchillo now experienced a greater embarrassment than ever, and a fresh timidity when he found himself in the young girl's presence.

The weather was grown milder, and the two men profited by the change to take a stroll in the garden.

"Listen," said the old convict to his companion, as soon as they were alone, and could not be overheard: "We must regulate our mode of life. I am accustomed to an active existence in the open air, for one thing, and, on the other hand, I wish you to be in the house as much as possible, near the old man and the women. It is your element. Get into their good graces and make yourself welcome. Persons who *please* are never suspected; they are believed in and defended. Then, we can rest perfectly easy and feel secure in that quarter.

"I," he continued, "I am too old to play the gallant, and my head is too *marked*. I feel that I am not congenial to women of the better class, and it is unnecessary to go against the grain. So, as we are to divide our labors, to you belongs the interior, and, to me, the out-of-doors work. Take care of the old man, and play with the damsels. Make your nest with the pet-

ticoats. As for me, I will superintend the farm improvements."

"Perhaps you are right."

"Good! Moreover, I must look after Sylvain, in order to sound him, turn him inside out and find out what he knows or suspects; I don't like his looks. He is the only one of the household who knew me formerly, and who could consequently recognize me."

"After all, that would not be so serious—" interrupted Cuchillo, with some hesitation, like a man in fear of new complications. "I might easily have run across my former preceptor in America. Did not this actually happen, moreover?" he parenthetically added, in a gloomy tone. "And have brought him back with me, converted and changed like myself."

"Absurd! If he recognizes me he will remember my name, which will recall the fact that I am—*an escaped galley-slave!*"

"True!" murmured Cuchillo, with a terrified shudder.

"Now, if Justice hears Louis Clermont spoken of she will lay her hands on him, and, I once caught, so are you!"

Cuchillo turned very pale.

"What is to be done, then?" he muttered.

"That is my affair. After breakfast I will ask Sylvain to show me over the estate and present me to the farmers. And I will find out what we have to fear from him."

"Are you certain?"

"I am certain of nothing—except that——"

"What?" asked Cuchillo, uneasily.

Clermont sneered, and replied:

"When I have passed an hour alone with the old fellow I will see my way clearer."

"And if he has recognized you, what will you do?" Cuchillo wished to say; but he dared not put the question, foreseeing too well some terrible answer—which he would rather not hear, and, concerning which, he preferred to remain ignorant.

"So, it is agreed!" pursued Clermont. "After

breakfast, you will beg Sylvain to accompany me. You can explain why to the old man and the women."

"Yes!" replied Cuchillo, greatly agitated at the idea of the danger which perhaps threatened them; and thinking with despair that all difficulties had not ended, as he had hoped they would, with the kind reception of the "Little Fairy" and of the duke.

A quarter of an hour later the bell summoned them to breakfast, at which everything passed off well.

Cuchillo played his part happily, and with a greater desire than ever to succeed. He took pleasure in it. And, then, Jeanne's beautiful eyes made him wish to remain near her, to obtain her esteem—her love!

He explained that Bernard was anxious to make himself useful and wished to learn the duties he would have to perform.

This appeared very natural, and, at two o'clock in the afternoon, Louis Clermont started off, accompanied by Sylvain, who was still morose and undecipherable, to cast a first glance over the lands which surrounded the *château*, and to make the acquaintance of the duke's tenants.

CHAPTER XI.

LOUIS CLERMONT BRINGS THINGS TO A POINT.

ON leaving the house Clermont and Sylvain took a little path to the right which conducted them rapidly into the open country.

The Duke of Kandos was a large landed proprietor and principally occupied himself in agricultural improvements, bringing into his occupation something of the passion and ruggedness of the peasant, and having but one object in view; to constantly enlarge and improve his possessions.

In place of abandoning his lands to tenants, he had adopted the life of a gentleman-farmer.

His income, of which he did not expend one-fourth,

each year increased, and the surplus was invested in more land.

In this way he had come to be one of the largest proprietors in that province, and the improvement of his farms and the felling of his timber demanded the superintendence and activity of intelligent and competent men. His distrust would not let him, up to the present, have a steward, to whom he could hand over his fatigues and cares. Jeanne, aided by Sylvain, had for the past two years given herself entirely to this constant labor.

They submitted everything to the duke, but he felt that things could not prosper thus, and he saw his revenues slowly diminish.

The arrival of his son, and of a capable and devoted man, such as Bernard had been described to be, would therefore be a great comfort to him, and exactly answered to the necessity of the present state of affairs.

Clermont and Sylvain at first walked together in silence. The old peasant appeared in no wise disposed to commence the conversation, and Clermont did not think that the time had yet come for him to begin. He recognized the country in which he had spent some months twenty years before, observed the changes made and kept his impressions to himself.

Nevertheless, after a walk of a quarter of an hour, seeing that they were going more and more into the interior of the estate, and getting further and further from the main road, he began the conversation:

"Where are you going to conduct me first, my dear Monsieur Silvain?" he kindly asked.

"To the principal and most distant farmer's," answered Sylvain. "This path takes us straight there. It is with him that you will oftenest have business, and he is the most capable of them all, according to the ideas of monsieur le duc."

"Do you believe that we will have time to see everything to-day?"

"No! Night comes early at this season, and we started late."

"Don't let me fatigue you too much, after your journey to Besançon."

"Oh! such a trifle will not fatigue *me*."

"In fact, you are very alert and vigorous for your age."

"I am seventy-two, two years older than monsieur le duc."

"You don't look it. But, if I do cause you a little temporary inconvenience now, you will be able to rest afterwards, for I am to replace you out-of-doors, and you can devote yourself entirely to your master, whom you seem to adore."

"I was born under the family roof and have ever since eaten their bread," bruskly replied the peasant.

While conversing they had come upon a very wild piece of country. The cultivated land had given place to clusters of oak trees, and the rough ground was alternately broken and hilly.

All at once, after going round a slight hill, they came to a small, desolate, greyish-looking field, uncultivated, and almost without verdure of any kind.

At the border of the path was an irregular, yawning hole, which also appeared very deep.

"What is that?" asked Louis Clermont, astonished, for he had never before been over this part of the estate.

"That is the *Cattle-Hole!*"

"The *Cattle-Hole!*"

"Yes; it was once a stone-quarry, but it was abandoned—and it has sometimes happened that cattle have fallen in."

Clermont stopped and leaned over in order to see how deep the excavation was.

"One cannot see the bottom," said he.

"I believe you! It is at least sixty feet deep. And whoever pitched head first into it might as well recommend his soul to God."

"Would it kill him?"

"Oh! for sure! There are lots of stones in there,

and only five years ago a bull had his brains knocked out by them!"

"I am astonished that no barrier has been placed around it. A man might fall into it as well as a beast."

"Oh! the country people know the place—there is no danger."

They pursued their route, and without any fresh incident, soon arrived at the farm. The way had been long and wearisome. Still Clermont had no wish for rest, and so arranged it that Sylvain should get none either.

He engaged the farmer in conversation, and astonished him with his knowledge of agriculture, a knowledge he had acquired in America, where, like most others, he had tried his hand at farming before beginning the life of a simple *gaucho*, which had also taught him all about cattle.

He had everything explained to him down to the smallest detail; in short, he showed himself capable of performing his duties seriously and ably.

This appeared to disturb the tenant-farmer, who would naturally have preferred to do business with a man not so well versed in agricultural matters, and it surprised Sylvain so much that he could not entirely conceal his astonishment. There was also to be read a certain change in his rustic face, and once or twice Louis Clermont surprised an expression of satisfaction, and almost of sympathy, on the part of the duke's old servant.

This was because Sylvain was so attached to his master, and so identified himself with his interests, that he was happy to see that the superintendence from which he had been deposed would be in still more capable and abler hands than his own.

When Clermont had sufficiently tired out the old man and the farmer, they returned to the farm-house, where all three sat down before a small jug of the light wine of that country, having a very marked taste of sulphur.

They commenced to drink. While conversing, Louis Clermont even managed to start a sufficiently lively

discussion on a question of absolutely no importance, and set the two countrymen by the ears, only occupying himself in keeping the wine going around.

The favorite sin of all countrymen is the love for a little too much wine and brandy. And Sylvain—Sylvain the virtuous, the pious—who all his life had been strictly honest, and with a severity of manners almost monastic, as he grew old had ended by giving way to the bottle ; and a jug of light wine, with an earthy taste, had irresistible attraction for him. He could pass by a tavern, and content himself with water ; but, once in the presence of his favorite beverage, he knew not when to stop.

Clermont, with his infernal memory and terrible spirit of observation, remembered this weakness. He had, therefore, come out with the intention of getting Sylvain drunk, and then "pumping" him.

The farmer, on his side, desirous of being agreeable to the duke's new steward, did not spare the wine, and produced his best. After the wine they passed on to brandy.

At the expiration of an hour, Sylvain was fairly launched, and drank recklessly. The day advanced, the sun had set, and the wind had changed. It was very cold.

"Now, let us be off," suddenly said Clermont. "We have rested and conversed long enough ; so, forward!"

Sylvain arose without saying anything.

"Take another drop," said the farmer, who was also slightly tipsy. "It is cold. This will warm you up!"

They drank a last glass of brandy, and Bernard and Sylvain departed.

In an hour's time it would be night.

They gained the highway which traversed the village, situated half-way between the farm and the chateau. This was a longer way than by the path they had come, but Clermont wished to visit a piece of land on the main road near the village.

The cold, as we have said, had become severe. It produced its effect on the old man, increasing the

action of the alcohol, which had already gone to his head.

Clermont, who perceived this, accelerated his pace, almost forcing Sylvain to run in order to keep up with him. This ended in making the old man drunk. Although he did not wish to acknowledge it, he began to feel weary, and became more and more affected by drink, as well as by the rapidity of his motion.

They at last came to the village, the first house of which, as usual, was a tavern.

"Suppose we enter and refresh ourselves!" tranquilly said Clermont. "It will rest our legs."

Sylvain eagerly accepted the proposal, and they sat down before a large table, at one end of a great, dark hall, on which was placed a fresh jug of the sulphur-tasting wine, soon followed by a second, and then by a third.

Now, Sylvain had drank "like a fish."

"This is the right moment!" thought the ex-convict. "We will converse seriously, and I will know what you have inside of you, you old fox!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE WINE SPEAKS.

"THIS devilish wine freezes me and palls upon my stomach!" exclaimed Clermont. "One might as well swallow a box of sulphur matches. Don't you agree with me, my dear Monsieur Sylvain? I am used to another sort of wine, but it is not probable that we would find it here."

"Oh! certainly not!" replied Sylvain, his tongue a little thick.

"Then, let us return to brandy. It has a flavor which charms me!"

And, without waiting for a reply, he called the tavern-keeper and ordered him to fetch a decanter of brandy.

He poured some into the brown, earthen jug, still wet with the wine it had contained, taking care to put only a few drops in his own cup, while he half filled his companion's. There is nothing so deceiving as a cup!

Sylvain, who could not get any drunker, considering he was already as drunk as he could be, mechanically drank his cupful at a single draught.

As for Clermont, although making the other drink, he took good care of himself, and was never cooler in his life. Besides, like most scoundrels of his description, he had an iron constitution, which could stand anything.

"My dear Monsieur Sylvain," he said, leaning over the table, "you seem to be very sympathetic, and I am glad of it, for we are henceforward destined to live near each other, and I will, doubtless, have need to seek your good advice and get important information from you."

The old peasant, on hearing these words, raised his heavy head, and strongly contracted his thick and shaggy white eyebrows. Apparently his interlocutor had awakened in him some former idea, momentarily forgotten. Drunkenness, in the beginning, distracts the mind and makes one forgetful; then comes another stage, which recalls one's original ideas, and makes them cling to one's memory in a persistent and determined manner.

"Ah! yes!" said he, with a sort of anger, "that is true—you are—at the—*château*, and you—are—going —to live there—from this—on!"

"Exactly, my dear Sylvain. And that is what I want to talk with you about. I am going to be frank and sincere with you, as I hope you would be with me." Here Louis Clermont paused a moment, in order to give greater emphasis to what he was about to say next, and then resumed: "You are, I know, the model of servants, in addition to which you are a devoted friend of the duke. He is right in having confidence in you; you merit it in every respect. As for

me, I consider you the same as a member of this noble family."

Sylvain listened with a gloomy air, mechanically carrying his empty cup to his lips, but remained silent, through a kind of rustic instinct which taught him to be prudent and distrustful.

Louis Clermont took good care to give him no more drink. He was at the right point. More would have been too much.

"Eh, well," he continued: "Under these circumstances, there is one thing which astonishes me, disturbs me, afflicts me and which I do not understand." He sighed. "It is the sad, morose and discontented air, not to call it any worse, with which you have received the return of the son of the house, of Monsieur le Marquis de Kandos."

"Ah! the marquis, yes, he too has returned," replied Sylvain. "Yes, yes, I know. But there is——"

He paused and vigorously rubbed his head with his right hand, according to a habit he had whenever he experienced any hesitation or lively sensation.

"There is—what?" hastily said Clermont, who had noticed a threat in the old fellow's tone.

"Nothing!"

"You are not telling the truth, my dear Sylvain. And that surprises me." He stopped, assumed a solemn air, and continued: "You are a religious man, I believe."

"Eh! well?"

"Well, religion forbids lying."

"I! a liar!" replied Sylvain, striking the table heavily.

"Undoubtedly. You said there was nothing on your mind, and there is something!"

"By Jove!" grumbled the old man, who, when drunk or angry, resumed the language of his campaigning days, "you perhaps know it better than I do." And he winked one eye in a manner which he wished to render at once sly and threatening.

"How should I know it? Is it because you do not love your master's son?"

"Who says that?" interrupted Sylvain, hastily.

"Why, your actions!"

Sylvain opened his blue eyes.

"Are you unhappy at having your poor old master, blind, powerless and so sad, recover his only son, who will be with him to sustain and console his last days?"

"Oh! how good he is!" murmured the faithful servitor, becoming affected at the memory of his master, and his eyes wet with tears, which were principally due to the surplus wine and brandy, for the French peasant only becomes tender when his money is concerned or when he is drunk.

"Then, it is n't his return which displeases you—it is something else—which ruffles you?"

"Indeed!"

"Since you love the marquis—it must be *I* whom you don't like?"

Sylvain sneered.

"Drink!" said he.

"There!" Clermont poured him out a few drops, and resumed: "Is it because I have taken your place?"

"Ah! no, indeed—you are more capable than I am. And I am old. Provided I remain near monsieur—le duc—I—I ask—nothing more!" he hiccoughed.

"It must be, then, because you don't like my face?"

Sylvain recovered himself with a last effort and for an instant looked Clermont straight in the face. One could see that he was struggling against the mists created by brandy. Then, with the rapidity of drunkenness, passing from quietness and reserve to violence and frankness, he said:

"Enough trifling! I know your face only too well!"

Louis Clermont trembled slightly; but he expected this reply, and lost none of his customary coolness.

"Explain yourself—what do you mean?"

"You know well enough! You call yourself Monsieur Bernard, as I might call myself monsieur le duc."

"You are drunk, and don't know what you are saying."

"Drunk, I!" and, staggering, he endeavored to get up.

Clermont seized him by the shoulder and made him sit down again.

"Yes," he resumed, "I repeat, you don't know what you are saying."

"Ah! I don't know what I am saying. Wait, you will see. Ah! I am drunk! Ah! ah!" and he gave a stupid laugh. "I see clear enough, all the same—and I know you very well. You are the former professor—he who ruined—the young man."

"That is all right!" exclaimed Clermont, seizing the other's hand and clasping it affectionately. "You are a brave man, my dear Sylvain, sincere and clear sighted—sharper than you seem to be—and speaking from the heart, as one should do."

Sylvain appeared flattered at these compliments, which rendered homage to his acuteness and loyalty, and he allowed his hand to be squeezed without resistance or protestation, with the facile disposition of the drunkard who is as ready to embrace as to beat you.

"So, then," pursued the convict, "you recognized me, at the first glance, like that? The devil! but you are sharp!"

"Well, night before last——"

"One could n't see the least thing!"

"No, but Sylvain is cunning. He heard, though he couldn't see!"

"You recognized my voice?"

"No! it wasn't that; but, when I told you to go on to the village, where you would find an inn, you replied: 'It would take half an hour to get there, and we are so—soak—soaked.'" He had a fresh attack of the hiccoughs.

"Well, wasn't that true?"

"True enough! But you had just before told me that you were a stranger, and did not know the coun-

try—and then—I said to myself: 'This fellow wishes to deceive you; he is a liar!'"

Clermont bit his lips. He now remembered this mistake he had committed in his haste to get into the *chateau.*

"Well, and afterwards, my friend Sylvain?"

"Afterwards? I kept my eyes open, and next day I recognized you—from a lot of things, although you, like the marquis, had greatly changed. But I am, as it were, the watch-dog of the *château.* I have a nose, do you see. I scent people, and I feel the presence of an enemy at a distance."

"I, an enemy?"

"Yes, you! you who led astray the young man in former times, who was his evil genius, as monsieur le duc says."

"And now?"

"Now? I do not wish you to remain at the *château.* There!"

"Indeed! What are you afraid of?"

"You did too much evil there, *in former times!*" This was decidedly his favorite expression. "And monsieur le duc would not wish it either, if he only knew what I do."

"Who would tell him?"

"I will!"

"You haven't told him then, yet?"

"No."

"Nor the 'Little Fairy,' when you went to Besançon with her?"

"No."

"Why is that?"

"Because it is none of her business. She is a pious girl, and a good young lady; by the Virgin! she is. But she is very young, and is not a member of the family—I only *know* monsieur le duc!"

"Eh, well! you had time to forewarn him."

"I am a fool—I did not dare; I recoiled—for fear of giving him pain, and waking up his former anger ——"

"Then, it is unnecessary to tell him anything——"

"Ah! but I must!"

"You are decided?"

"Certainly! As our God, who died on the cross, is my witness!"

He let his head fall, then raised it again.

"Some drink!" said he, with an effort.

Clermont emptied the decanter in the faithful old servant's cup, and he drained it at a draught.

"I bear you no ill will, my good Sylvain," continued the ex-convict, "you have a devoted heart—and I would do the same in your place. Since you wish it, I will leave the chateau to-morrow."

"That is all right!" said Sylvain, suddenly become affectionate and amicable. "Embrace me!"

He tried to arise.

"Hold, I love you! but you must leave——"

"Yes, yes, to-morrow!"

"You swear it!"

"By the Virgin, yes!"

"Agreed! What a fine fellow you are, all the same—altogether you are a famous scamp!"

Clermont had risen. He went and paid the inn-keeper, and returning, said, pleasantly:

"Let us be off, my dear Sylvain, it is time to go. It is late and the duke will be uneasy if he does not see you this evening."

Sylvain staggering, got upon his legs.

"Take my arm," said the false Bernard.

"He has good need of it!" sneered the inn-keeper, "you will have difficulty in getting him home."

"Oh! we will get there," smilingly replied the former *gaucho*.

"You know the way?"

"Yes, sufficiently well."

The two men went along the road, on which the north wind raged and stung one's face.

Sylvian staggered along on Clermont's arm, which he clasped affectionately.

It was seven o'clock at night, and was very dark.

* * * * * * * * *

The next day, at noon, neither of them had re-

appeared at the *chateau*, and everybody was afoot, a prey to great uneasiness, fearing lest some evil had happened to worthy Sylvain and poor Monsieur Bernard.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CATTLE-HOLE.

UP to nine o'clock the previous evening they had been expected, but no serious anxiety was felt at their absence.

The duke's property was large ; his lands and forests extended over hundreds of acres on every side.

The two men had been surprised by nightfall, they reasoned, at some distance from home.

As the hour advanced they supposed that Bernard and Sylvain, being much fatigued, had decided to sleep at some farmer's——

This was not natural, but still it was not impossible.

The next morning they awaited them from minute to minute, saying :

"They have doubtless profited by the fine weather," for it was a magnificent day; dry and cold, favorable to tramping over fields, "to finish their tour of inspection ! Bernard has wished to see it all at once."

By noon their last hopes had fled.

As Bernard and Sylvain had not returned it was because some misfortune had befallen them.

The old duke, who was attached to his old servant and really loved him, could conceal neither his fears nor his agitation.

The "Little Fairy," as well as Annette, in vain endeavored to re-assure him.

"No, no," said he, "I know Sylvain. He is the steadiest and most regular man in the world. In order for him not to be here, this morning, at his regular hour for reading my paper to me, something very

serious, which I cannot explain to myself, must have happened, or——he must be dead!"

But he whose anguish was the greatest and most terrible was Cuchillo.

Knowing Louis Clermont, and his suspicions in regard to Sylvain, he shuddered at this prolonged absence, behind which he foresaw the threat of some frightful drama.

Clermont had evidently become certain that Sylvain was inimical to him. And what had happened then?

What act had this man, who recoiled before nothing, and whose cool resolution, and fierce energy, he knew so well, committed to disembarrass himself of a witness and to close a mouth ready to denounce him?

What dark plan had he conceived?

Had he succeeded?

Had he been foiled?

If the first, there was a fresh crime to add to the series in which Cuchillo found himself already mixed up, which he had accepted, and which hung heavier and heavier upon him.

In the second case, would not everything be discovered?

And would not he, for a long while more unhappy than culpable, this time justly fall into merited disgrace, and under the punishment of the laws which he had so audaciously violated.

This anxiety and uncertainty became insupportable; and, still he was afraid to assure himself of the reality.

Meanwhile, when, at mid-day he saw a lot of the servants about to set off in search of the two men, he judged it prudent to accompany them.

He took two of the farm hands with him, and entered a carriage which had been made ready.

The first thing to do, was to go to the farmer's, where Sylvain was to have conducted Bernard the day before. In three quarters of an hour they had arrived at the honest peasant's, who appeared much surprised at their questions. He said that Monsieur Bernard and Sylvain had spent part of the day with him, and

had started on their return to the *chateau* about five o'clock, shortly before nightfall.

"What route did they take?" asked Cuchillo.

"The main road?"

"That which we came?"

"The same."

"There isn't another?"

"No."

"That is strange. We noticed nothing remarkable on our way."

"Perhaps they may have stopped in the village, to refresh themselves at the tavern."

"We will go there!" replied the marquis.

He got into the carriage with his two companions, and was rapidly driven back to the miserable hamlet, which the people of the surrounding country honored with the name of village.

When questioned, the inn-keeper replied that those they were seeking had indeed stopped at his house, which they had left again after dark, about seven o'clock.

"At that time, did they seem to manifest the intention of returning to the *chateau*?" asked Cuchillo.

"Certainly——At the same time I ought, perhaps, to tell monsieur le marquis that old Sylvain was slightly intoxicated——"

"Ah! and Monsieur Bernard?"

"Oh! *he* carried himself as coolly and composedly as either you or I. To such an extent that he offered his arm to Sylvain, whose steps were somewhat shaky."

"And," continued Cuchillo, with some hesitation, "they did not appear to have quarreled?"

"Oh! Lord, no! They were, on the contrary, the best friends in the world—united like fingers of the same hand. Old Sylvain, saving your presence, was even too familiar with the strange gentleman, who was to replace him in the stewardship."

This answer in no wise reassured Cuchillo. He knew Clermont's *style* of doing things.

'Which way did they take?" he added.

"The main road."

"Is there no other?"

"Oh! yes—there is a shorter path——"

"Where is this path?"

"A little farther down to the left."

"Is it dangerous?"

"Not at all."

"Still," observed one of the farm hands, who had accompanied the marquis, "there is the *Cattle-Hole*, and, at night, a drunken man might fall into it."

"One who did not know the country might, but Sylvain could go in safety ten times around it with his eyes closed, and the gentleman wasn't the least tipsy, consequently——"

"Let us go to this place at once," said Cuchillo.

They this time started on foot, for the carriage could not have traversed the narrow path, which was also full of ruts. In half-an-hour they had reached the spot we have already mentioned.

The two servants first looked about them, and then approached the yawning pit.

"Nothing seems to have happened here," said one, after a moment's pause.

"One can see or hear nothing," added the other.

But Cuchillo looked and listened for himself; and he, the former convict and *gaucho*, having lived for a long while the almost savage life of the *pampa*, possessed more acute senses than the two countrymen.

He bent down and examined the edge of the hole, and pointed out to them some stones freshly disturbed, then a torn-up tuft of grass, and the marks, on the hard ground, where five rigid fingers had slightly scratched the soil.

"Some one has fallen down there!" said he, in a clear voice. "And there is no time to lose!"

His companions were about to reply, when, motioning them to remain silent, he lay down on the ground and placed his ear to the edge of the hole, and for a moment remained motionless.

He then dragged himself a little farther along, so that he could look straight down into the dark and gloomy pit. He shaded his eyes from the sunlight

with one hand for a short time, and then, rising to his feet and looking very pale, finally said :

"They are there !"

His companions, who had heretofore been foolishly contemplating him, and were almost ready to laugh at his proceedings, now drew near in great surprise.

"I have seen two bodies in the darkness, and I heard one feeble groan."

"Ah ! my God ! Then they are dead !"

"One of them, at least, is living, since he groaned. Run to the *chateau*, and bring back ladders and ropes —quick, quick, I will remain here !"

"Which lives ?" he asked himself, in a terrible manner, when he was alone. "Is it Sylvain or Clermont ? —or both. Is it a natural accident, or a crime, attempted and failed in by Clermont ? I must know— before they return."

He cast a troubled glance around him. The pit had been dug straight down on the side of the path ; but on the other side it was more uneven. The rain and frost had little by little worn it away. This did not prevent the descent from being terribly steep, and any other man would have recoiled at the idea of attempting a descent over this slippery ground.

Yet Cuchillo, urged on by terror, resolved to know what fate held in store for him, comprehending that his whole life was at stake. He decided, after a few minutes' hesitation, to attempt the foolhardy and desperate action of descending to the bottom of the pit.

He noticed some stones in the soil, and several tufts of wild herbage, which it seemed possible to hold on to with his hands or to rest his feet upon.

"Here goes !" said he, "it must be done ! And then, after all, if I am killed, eh ! well, that will end everything ; but I cannot wait till they are pulled out, at the risk of Sylvain's being only wounded, and declaring, which I fear, that Bernard has tried to murder him, and that the assissin's real name is Clermont.

Then, taking off his overcoat, he placed it around his head in such a way as to make a kind of thick cushion, intended to protect it in case of a possible, or,

rather, probable, fall ; and, stiffening his muscles and gliding like a snake, he commenced the perilous undertaking.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE QUARRY.

THE first few yards were easy enough ; but the farther Cuchillo descended the more difficult as well as dangerous it became. His hands were bleeding, aud he had in truth to make superhuman efforts to keep from falling, as he went down inch by inch. Little by little, however, he increased his distance from the mouth of the quarry, and the sky over his head grew smaller.

All at once he stopped; clinging to an imperceptible projection with his cramped fingers, the nails of which had been torn off by the stones, he felt that there was nothing beneath him on which he could rest his feet.

At this point there had doubtless been a caving in of the wall he was trying to descend, and he now found himself attached to a projection overhanging the space yet to be passed over before reaching the solid earth at the bottom.

How much farther was the latter? He did not know ; but he now heard very distinctly the groans which had first attracted his attention.

He endeavored to raise himself so as to find some support for his feet, but his exhausted forces gave way, his fingers loosened their hold, and he fell, heavily, with the horror and feeling that certain death awaited him.

The precaution he had taken of protecting his head saved him. On touching the bottom, where he lay extended on his back for some time, he had struck against one of the large pieces of stone lying there, and if his head had not the thick covering upon it his skull would certainly have been crushed. He

had escaped with a sensation of great pain throughout his body, and a giddiness which left him unconscious for several minutes.

Finally the cold re-animated him. He opened his eyes, remembered where he was, examined himself, found that he had broken no bones, and that there was only a general aching of his whole body.

After two or three vain efforts, he at last succeeded in regaining his feet. He saw about five yards over his head the projection from which he had fallen; then, lowering his eyes, he finally distinguished lying near him the two bodies he had partially seen from above.

They were, indeed, Clermont and Sylvain.

The first stirred feebly, and uttered plaintive cries.

The other was silent and motionless.

Cuchillo stooped over his friend and raised his head, Clermont half opened his eyes.

"Ah! it is you!" he murmured. "By all the devils! I believed I was going to die here like a dog!"

"Where are you wounded? Where do you suffer?"

"Everywhere!"

"Cannot you rise, or hold yourself up?"

"No!"

"Have you broken no bones?"

"How do I know? I am as limber as a rag, thirsty, and have a fever! *Carajo!*"

"And the other man?" asked Cuchillo.

"Dead, surely!" feebly replied Clermont, "feel him—he has not once budged, but find out for certain. It is—it is important!"

Cuchillo softly laid Clermont's head on the earth, and, approaching Sylvain's body, tried to raise it to a sitting posture. It was rigid and cold, and ceased to be pliant. On observing the body closer, Cuchillo found that the skull was fractured, it having struck against the same stone near which he had rolled in his much shorter fall.

"Yes, he is dead!" he said, with a shudder. "You

have a chance of living," he added, returning to Clermont.

"If I can only get out of here!" murmured the latter.

"How did this happen ?"

"In falling he drew me with him, the old beast! Happily,—he was underneath——his carcass served as a mattress—I rebounded—and here I am! I must be gotten out of this—I suffer like one of the damned."

"Evidently," replied Cuchillo; "but I can do nothing alone. I am expecting assistance. They have gone after ropes and ladders."

A quarter of an hour passed by in a profound silence, except for the occasional complaints and curses of the old convict. He was unable to continue a sustained conversation, and Cuchillo did not care to question him or to examine too closely into what had occurred.

Sylvain was silent, since he was dead. Clermont was badly injured. They had both fallen into the pit. Nothing could be said, no one could suspect or accuse —perhaps, after all, it had been a genuine accident.

Cuchillo, in truth, did not believe this; but he preferred to appear to believe it, and even to pretend to himself to believe it.

At the end of twenty minutes, he gave a start, and a long sigh of relief.

The sonorous walls communicated to his practiced ears the sounds of distant and hasty steps. Soon he heard the confused voices of a crowd of people, and, finally, he could see their heads projecting over the sides of the pit, between him and the sky.

The people from the *chateau* had arrived and were leaning over in order to interrogate the dark depths of the abandoned stone quarry.

"Monsieur le marquis?" they cried.

They were astonished at not finding him where they had left him—they sought for him, and became uneasy.

"Here!" he replied.

There was a cry of joy.

"Lower ropes and ladders, and let four men descend."

"How came *you* there?" asked a woman's voice, which he recognized as the "Little Fairy's."

"I tried to descend—and I fell."

A cry of terror was the only answer to this.

"But I am not hurt, I assure you!" he hastened to add.

At length two long ladders, fastened together, were let down by ropes, and soon four vigorous fellows were beside Cuchillo.

"Sylvain is dead!" he immediately said. "We will take his body up later on. Monsieur Bernard lives, but is dying. He must be taken up first, but very carefully."

This was not easy. The old convict uttered terrible cries every time they touched him, or made him make the least movement, and the ascent was long and painful.

But,—and Cuchillo could not help wondering at and admiring the other's great self control and coolness, from the moment when he felt strangers about him, the ex-convict suppressed his oaths and did not let a syllable escape which could betray him, or which was in contradiction with the new character he had adopted.

As soon as he was brought to the surface they placed him on one of two hastily constructed stretchers which had been provided by the foresight of Madamoiselle de Léon, and he was carried off towards the *chateau*, completely exhausted and overcome by the intense pain which his fall had caused him.

Sylvain's corpse was raised more rapidly and with less difficulty, and, last of all, Cuchillo ascended from the gloomy quarry.

Madamoiselle de Léon gazed upon the body of the duke's old servant with tears in her eyes and hands clasped, murmuring:

"Poor Sylvain! what a blow for your master!"

She was turning away when she heard the marquis's voice. She hastened towards him, excitedly.

"Monsieur le marquis, ah! here you are at last!—you might have killed yourself!——"

"I heard groans. I knew help would be long in arriving. I tried to descend to their aid—and you see, mademoiselle, I am safe and sound."

"But covered with blood!"

She regarded him a moment in silence.

"I knew you were good!—and courageous!" she all at once said, with a burst of enthusiasm which suddenly illuminated her charming face, which was full of solicitude, fright and admiration.

"Madamoiselle," said Cuchillo, turning aside his eyes with an anguish of the heart hitherto unknown to him, "I do not merit such compliments—from such a mouth!"

And, bowing his head, he hastened away,—a blush on his forehead, ashamed of himself, charmed with her, unhappy and deeply humiliated;—to the side of Sylvain's corpse, which was surrounded by peasants.

"Place a covering over the body," suddenly said the false marquis, giving a shudder.

The peasants obeyed, and the sorrowful procession made its way towards the *chateau*, followed by Jeanne and Cuchillo. She had taken his arm, and both walked along silently.

"Crime precedes me!" he thought, with a sort of superstitious and unknown terror.

He dared not add: "And love accompanies me!" But he felt on his arm the soft pressure of a woman's small hand, and it seemed to him as if his arm was on fire.

CHAPTER XV.

FAMILY AFFAIRS.

LOUIS CLERMONT kept his bed for over six weeks. He had broken no bones, but the shock had been so violent and the fear of death so great, that they thought he had received some internal injuries along with cerebral complications.

However, his strong constitution saved him, and, in spite of nervousness, fever and delirium, during which Cuchillo, from prudential reasons which were taken for the devotion of friendship, nursed the sick man himself, the old convict never entirely lost his senses, and let nothing escape him which might compromise their situation.

A summary inquiry was held in regard to the accident; that is, when Monsieur Bernard was strong enough to answer, they asked him how the misfortune had occurred.

Clermont's account was most clear, simple and convincing.

Everyone knew that Sylvain was drunk on the evening in question, which did not astonish those who knew him, and was barely able to stand up, for Bernard had been compelled to give him his arm in order to help his staggering steps.

They also knew that Monsieur Bernard, a stranger to the country, who had only arrived at the *château* two days previously, could not be very well acquainted with the roads.

Sylvain, in order to shorten their way, wished to travel by the small path, and Bernard consented, without supposing any danger could befall them. They had arrived at the very edge of the quarry, and every-

thing was obscure owing to the darkness of the night. The old peasant's foot had slipped and he fell into the hole, drawing with him Monsieur Bernard, who was likewise a victim to his ignorance of the place, and the drunkenness of his companion.

No one exhibited the slightest doubt of this story, entirely reasonable, and which all the known facts confirmed.

Cuchillo believed what he wished of it and what he could; but he carefully avoided demanding the real truth from his accomplice, who, on his side, for some reason or other, told the marquis no more than he had everyone else.

Now that he was saved, Clermont did not so much regret the accident which had given his story such a semblance of truth; and he felt that he had not paid too dearly for their present state of security.

During Clermont's illness, Cuchillo, obliged to attend himself to the farming interests, had frequent interviews with Jeanne.

We know that until now Mademoiselle de Léon had been, so to speak, the duke's principal *man of business*, so it was therefore to her that Cuchillo had to address himself for all necessary information. She was the instructress he needed. Did he not have to be fully informed in regard to everything relating to the duke's interest?

She brought into this work a wonderful amount of zeal, desirous that the duke should congratulate himself on the activity and intelligence displayed by the marquis. It was a magnificent occasion for the "Little Fairy" to restore the father's confidence and affection to the son. It was also a happiness to the young girl to feel near her, to constantly see the man whom she had loved, in her dreams, before knowing him, because he was unhappy; and whom she now loved in reality, because he responded to her ideal picture of him.

We know that Cuchillo possessed every charm that goes to please a woman; above all, that manly and often fatal beauty which he had received from nat-

ure. Then his varied life, the terrible circumstances in which his existence had been passed, gave his character that romantic coloring which is so attractive.

Still, Jeanne forbade herself to think of this love, and believed she had almost succeeded, making a pretext and excuse in her own eyes that she was only rendering a service to the duke, in bringing his son closer to him; and to the marquis, in restoring him his father's esteem.

"I make two people happy!" she said to herself. "It is my duty."

There were three happy, counting herself. But her happiness was so mixed with suffering, that she dared not avow it, and her genuine heroism concealed her real weakness.

As to Cuchillo, he loved her! He loved her with all the strength of his heart. From the very first she had charmed him. Ever since he knew himself loved by her; ever since he had read the pages in which she spoke of him and confessed her unreasoning love, he had also loved her. He was intoxicated by the perfume of honesty and by the warmth of soul which radiated from her.

Her gracious and striking beauty, the pride and the nobility of her character, at once heroic and tender, all fascinated and enchanted him.

This was all so new to him. It differed so much from all he had previously seen and felt, that he was unable to struggle against his sentiments, and was caught even before he knew it.

Mademoiselle de Léon was such a contrast to Mariquita, was so little like her, appeared to him so absolutely of another world, that he loved Jeanne, without ceasing to love the memory of the *marquesa.*

If he had been told that he would so soon forget one who had died for him he would have been profoundly astonished, and, in good faith and with truth, would have replied:

"What is there in common between these two women, these two loves? I forget nothing and I replace nothing—this is entirely different!"

So different was it that although adoring Jeanne, although only living in her presence, the idea never entered his head that she could be his. He felt unworthy of her, and that she was too far above him for him to ever dream of rising to the same plane. This was a kind of worship. She was his heaven and his conscience. He became transfigured under her influence, and the past seemed like a nightmare, whenever he thought of it. He had, as yet, no horror for the odious *rôle* which he had accepted and which he now passionately entered into; but a vague trouble and confused ideas substituted themselves for his former ways of feeling.

He was in a transitory period, knowing neither where he was drifting nor what he wished. He was ready to follow the course of events, whatever they might prove to be.

Three months, which were certainly the happiest of his life, passed away in this manner.

Guided by Mademoiselle de Léon, happy to obey and satisfy her; desirous of coming up to the ideal she had conceived of him, of obtaining her approbation, of conquering and meriting her esteem, he set himself resolutely to work, astonishing every one by his activity, intelligence, wisdom and knowledge of the affairs confided to his care.

This delighted Jeanne and surprised the old duke, who, at first implacable and defiant, refused to believe in the change of which there were abundant proofs.

The relations between these two men remained cold and stiff; stern on one side—troubled and timid on the other.

It should be said that Sylvain's death was a terrible blow to the duke. He loved his old servant. How much, he only knew after his loss. They had lived together; and old age is a creature of habit. Sylvain formed a part of his master, from whom he had acquired fanaticism, automatic regularity and a clear head. The absence of the old peasant left an immense void in the life of the blind duke. Their ways were so much alike.

Annette and Jeanne had, in turns, read his last quarterly journal to him, and infinitely better than he had been accustomed to hearing it read; but it was not the same monotonous voice and hesitating and uneven pronunciation which had always heretofore formed a part of the reading. The old man no longer understood political affairs, nor did he recognize the style of his favorite editorials, when read so well by the young girls' clear voices. It was no longer the same! He dared not say it; but he felt it, and it soon became visible that the blow had shaken his health and hastened the slow advent of dissolution.

"My old Sylvain calls me!" he sometimes said.

He grew weaker and older, as if the hours had become weeks, the weeks months, and the months years.

From the first the death of Sylvain had greatly irritated him against his son.

"He comes, and evil comes with him!" he would say to himself in a low tone.

Then, on observing how the marquis had changed, his unjust resentment little by little disappeared, although he remained inclosed in his icy dignity as the chief of the house, who had been long offended by filial rebellion.

Yet, for some time, to his coldness had been joined an air of profound meditation.

It would often happen that he would not listen to the reading of his journal, but would suddenly interrupt it, if Mademoiselle de Léon was the reader, and take her hands in his, and say, in a moved voice:

"Dear, dear girl!"

Many times she had even surprised traces of unexpected emotion on his rugged face, and, remaining silent in place of continuing the reading, the duke, although not asleep, would never notice it.

His thoughts were evidently far away, and some besetting idea occupied his mind.

This disturbed Jeanne, who knew that every change is a bad sign in old age.

One morning when she had come to read to him as usual, the duke said to her, kindly:

"Jeanne, let the journal go for to-day, and beg the marquis to come to me. I want to speak to him."

"I will go at once, monsieur le duc," replied Jeanne, regarding him with surprise.

"My child," he added, "come here!"

She went up to him.

He made her stoop, placed his dry lips to her forehead, and held them there for a moment. Then he let her go.

"Go, dear daughter!" he said, firmly, "go seek my son. And do not forget that I love you and count upon you!"

"What does he mean?" Jeanne asked herself, as she went out to perform the duke's orders. "Some extraordinary change is about to occur."

Five minutes later Cuchillo entered the study, and the two men found themselves alone together.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN WHICH THE DUKE MAKES KNOWN HIS WILL.

"WILL you sit down?" said the duke to Cuchillo, "I want to have a long and serious conversation with you?"

Cuchillo took a seat near the old man, waiting, uneasily, for what would come next.

With Jeanne and Annette he had succeeded in acquiring a certain amount of ease. Their fresh faces, one of which was charming, no longer inspired the uneasiness and embarrassment which he still felt, in spite of himself, in the presence of this blind old man, whose aspect froze and intimidated him more than if he had been in full possession of all his senses. These sightless eyes, fixed upon him for minutes at a time, appalled him.

"I am at your order," he said.

There was a short silence.

The duke was evidently preparing his discourse,

and Cuchillo, feeling that it concerned some grave question, put himself on guard and armed himself with his coolness and presence of mind.

"My son," at length resumed the duke, in a solemn tone, "you have frequently found me severe and hard towards you. You are not the only one. But I, myself, believe I have been simply just; I believe I have fulfilled my duty, my whole duty, towards you——"

"I do not complain," interrupted Cuchillo; "I know how much my sins, my wicked youth, the faults I have committed——"

"Very good; I am glad to hear you speak thus."

There was another short pause.

"I have remarked, however," continued the duke, "since your return a great change in you, and one upon which I congratulate you. You seem to have at last become a serious man, understanding life and its duties—you work with zeal and intelligence. It is a veritable transformation, a sort of miracle——"

"I hope to please you always—at least, I will make every effort to——"

The duke gave a slightly sarcastic smile.

"Oh! I don't assume the merit of it," said he, slowly; "or, rather, I do not attribute the change I have noticed solely to filial respect."

"Father, I assure you——"

"Let me speak." He collected his thoughts, and resumed: "So long as I alone tried to influence you, I did not succeed. Since your return you have evidently yielded to some influence; you obey another power than mine."

Cuchillo regarded him with uneasiness. What did he mean? Whom was he thinking of?

"Although blind, I see that clear enough! I know men and life."

"I do not exactly understand you."

"There is here, near you, some one——"

"Who is it?" quickly asked Cuchillo, his thoughts turning towards Clermont. He feared that the duke had discovered part of the truth concerning his accomplice.

"Some one," continued the duke, without directly replying to the question, "whose kindness has not ceased to exhibit itself towards me for some years."

He raised his determined eyes towards heaven.

Evidently these words could not be applied to Louis Clermont, and that reassured the ex-*gaucho*.

"It is to this person that I owe this preliminary step towards well-doing, which so astonishes me in you, and which all my authority would have been, as it was formerly, powerless to obtain."

"I am ignorant of whom you are speaking," said Cuchillo.

"It is *not* of your daughter," replied the duke, with a return of harshness.

Cuchillo trembled,

"Anette, poor child, no more than her grandfather, has not found, and probably would not find, the way to your heart. You abandoned her without remorse, and, for sixteen years, made no effort to regain her. A bad son must be a bad father—that was logical—and is so written."

"I acknowledge my faults and regret them. I have done my best to wipe them out," murmured Cuchillo.

He did not know where the conversation tended, and saw his interlocutor's forehead grow gloomy.

The duke shook his head, as if to chase away an unpleasant thought, and resumed :

"The person to whom I owe your conversion is Mademoiselle de Léon, whom everyone calls the 'Little Fairy.' She is a saint !" said he, in a tone at once softened and enthusiastic. "She has given me the only joys possible to a man in my situation, and I know, I have observed, that she does good wherever she is."

"Mademoiselle de Leon is indeed a noble and charming young girl," replied Cuchillo, with sincere emotion.

The duke nodded his approval and remained silent for a moment, then he resumed, in a kinder tone :

"My son, I am old, very old, older than my age and

than those around me believe. I have no illusions in regard to the number of days allotted to me. Before long, doubtless, I shall go, leaving you alone at the head of the fortune I have created and increased, and which, after you, ought to go to Annette, as it will to you after my death. Now, I am not without uneasiness in this respect; I fear lest this will intoxicate you, and that, the former man coming to the front again, you will recommence the life of disorder which for twenty years and more has been my Calvary and my shame——"

"I swear to you——"

"I would like, therefore," pursued the father, without hearing the interruption, "to take my precautions and assure you against yourself, your weaknesses and your bad insticts; in one word, I would like to be certain that the reformation commenced will be permanent, that there will be no backsliding on your part."

"What is he coming to?" Cuchillo uneasily asked himself, but said, aloud: "How will you give yourself this certainty?"

"I am about to let you know. I have not confidence in you, in you alone. You are not wicked, perhaps, but you are certainly weak, and the slave of your passions. You need near you a guide, a monitor, a being capable of restraining, directing, and keeping you in the right path."

He again paused for a few seconds.

"You are now a widower. A year has elapsed since your wife's death. You can remarry, and I think that you will accept the wife I have chosen for you."

Cuchillo arose.

"This one, I hope, I am sure, will repair the evil done by the other."

"A marriage!" murmured Cuchillo, overcome with surprise.

"Which I exact of you, yes, my son. And I suppose that, this time, you will obey me."

Cuchillo saw but one thing. He was to be separated from Jeanne. Certainly, he had not dreamt of

marrying her; but, so long as he was free, the less further off she appeared.

"You are silent?" continued the duke, severely, knitting his heavy eyebrows." Are you going to resist me, yet once again, and am I deceived in regard to you?"

"But, father—I so little expected it—I counted on remaining with you——"

"And so you will. The wife I have chosen for you is—Mademoiselle de Leon."

Cuchillo became as pale as a corpse, but the duke could not see it.

"She is poor, I know, but she has given me back my son, and, for a long time, she has been the friend, the mother of Annette, who worships her. That is equal to a dowry." He now spoke with a certain degree of warmth. "I have been reproached with being avaricious. You see, nevertheless, my son, that there are things I place above money: your safety, and the happiness of my granddaughter. Jeanne is the only person in whom I have an absolute confidence. She is still young, but she is wise and firm. She is pretty, they say, but I have not seen her for years, not since she was a child." He uttered a deep sigh. "Now, eternal darkness conceals her face from me."

"She is of an adorable beauty!" exclaimed Cuchillo.

"So much the better!" said the duke. "But she has more than this beauty: she has a grand heart, a strong will, and all the virtues which make an honest wife. In giving her to you—if she consents, which I hope she will—it seems to me that I place a good angel near you to finish the work, already begun, of your regeneration. It is to her alone, as I have told you, that I attribute the transformation I have remarked in you. I owe her, therefore, much, much more than I will ever be able to repay her. In the eyes of the world, I acquit myself of this debt in making a marchioness of her, now, and a duchess, soon; in my own eyes I am, and will always be, her debtor; and presently, in asking her to accept you as a husband, with

your past, it will be a last service, and the greatest that I can solicit of her heart, of her inexhaustible devotion." He paused, and then resumed more slowly: "You have heard me?"

"Yes, father," murmured Cuchillo, in whom pallor had given place to a vivid redness, and who was very much moved.

"I do not ask you for any response: that would be to admit that she might be refused, and I admit nothing of the kind. I have made known my wishes to you. I forbid your saying anything about it to Mademoiselle de Leon, before I have spoken of it to her. But I know her well enough to feel certain that she will yield to the prayer of an old man, and of a father, uneasy in regard to the future of his child." He interrupted himself again, but only to resume once more in a solemn and almost threatening tone: "Only, if she should ever be unhappy through your fault—believe me, that a father's curse will pursue you, and that heaven itself will help me to punish the crime!

"Now leave me, my son," he added, in a softer tone, "and await my further orders."

Cuchillo staggered out of the room.

CHAPTER XVII.

MADEMOISELLE DE LÉON.

"MONSIEUR LE MARQUIS:

"Excuse, I beg you, this hastily written letter; but I am still completely upset by what has happened.

"I so little expected such a thing!

"M. le duc sent for me, and said to me—the same he had said to you an hour before.

"Like you, Monsieur le Marquis, taken unawares, I did not know what to say to his request and prayers.

"I understand that you dared not refuse frankly

thing was obscure owing to the darkness of the night. The old peasant's foot had slipped and he fell into the hole, drawing with him Monsieur Bernard, who was likewise a victim to his ignorance of the place, and the drunkenness of his companion.

No one exhibited the slightest doubt of this story, entirely reasonable, and which all the known facts confirmed.

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During Clermont's illness, Cuchillo, obliged to attend himself to the farming interests, had frequent interviews with Jeanne.

We know that until now Mademoiselle de Léon had been, so to speak, the duke's principal *man of business*, so it was therefore to her that Cuchillo had to address himself for all necessary information. She was the instructress he needed. Did he not have to be fully informed in regard to everything relating to the duke's interest?

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ure. Then his varied life, the terrible circumstances in which his existence had been passed, gave his character that romantic coloring which is so attractive.

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"I make two people happy!" she said to herself. "It is my duty."

There were three happy, counting herself. But her happiness was so mixed with suffering, that she dared not avow it, and her genuine heroism concealed her real weakness.

As to Cuchillo, he loved her! He loved her with all the strength of his heart. From the very first she had charmed him. Ever since he knew himself loved by her; ever since he had read the pages in which she spoke of him and confessed her unreasoning love, he had also loved her. He was intoxicated by the perfume of honesty and by the warmth of soul which radiated from her.

Her gracious and striking beauty, the pride and the nobility of her character, at once heroic and tender, all fascinated and enchanted him.

This was all so new to him. It differed so much from all he had previously seen and felt, that he was unable to struggle against his sentiments, and was caught even before he knew it.

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If he had been told that he would so soon forget one who had died for him he would have been profoundly astonished, and, in good faith and with truth, would have replied:

"What is there in common between these two women, these two loves? I forget nothing and I replace nothing—this is entirely different!"

not to, I only cause her horror. She is going away. She will go away!"

All at once he stopped.

"Suppose she has gone!"

Then, without transition, like a madman he returned on a run to the *chateau.* On the door-step he found Clermont.

"Where is she?" asked Cuchillo, excitedly

"Who?"

"Jeanne!"

"I know nothing about her. I suppose she is in her room. What ails you, monsieur le marquis?"

"She has not gone?"

"Gone! Why? Where to?" replied Louis, who knew nothing of all this. "What has happened? what ails you?" he repeated, in a low voice, astonished and uneasy at the distracted air of his accomplice.

"Ah! let me go!" said the latter, pushing him violently aside, and hastening to the stairs, which he mounted in two bounds; he gained the corridor and opened the door of Jeanne's salon, without knowing what he was doing.

She was there!

Standing before the fireplace, in which was a bright fire, she held in her hand the diary which contained the record of her innermost thoughts and the confession of her romantic love, ready to throw it into the flames and thus destroy all remembrances of the past!

She was very pale, and her large eyes, surrounded by dark circles, announced how cruelly she had suffered.

At the noise Cuchillo made in closing the door behind him, she turned and saw him.

At sight of him, she hastily concealed the diary, which she had opened to take one last look into it, and stood mute, with lowered eyes and visibly shaken with emotion.

"Jeanne!" exclaimed Cuchillo, forgetting everything, and yielding to an impulse of his sanguine temperament, only remembering one thing: that he loved her and did not want to lose her. "Jeanne!" he re-

peated, "are you going to leave us? Do you hate and despise me?"

"Monsieur le marquis," replied the young girl, endeavoring to speak in a firm voice, "why do you say that?"

"Your letter, your cruel, pitiless letter, says so," responded the false marquis.

"No, no," interrupted Jeanne. "My letter does not say that, and I have sufficiently shown you, all of you, how much I esteem you. It is not a question of my sentiments—in respect to you. It is—of an—impossible marriage——"

"Why impossible? Because I am disagreeable to you—because my life, my conduct, my past—all drives you away from me? Oh! it is true! that is it! I had forgotten," he bitterly added.

"I swear to you, it is not that!"

"Then I don't understand! Oh! if you loved me as I do you, you would never speak of flying from this house, from me! It was you who got me admitted here, and I drive you away! And you believed I would consent to it, would accept it! Well, then! *I* shall go. I ought to!"

"You will remain, I wish you to!" she exclaimed, with an accent of tenderness which, in spite of herself, came from the deepest recesses of her heart.

"Then, tell me why this idea of becoming my wife causes you such horror——"

"It is not horror!" she feebly interrupted.

He drew near her, seized her hands, and tenderly pressed them, endeavoring to read her eyes, which were lowered and concealed beneath their long lashes.

"Jeanne, tell me that you do not hate me!"

"Do you not know?" she murmured.

"Oh! thanks!"

He kissed her hands in a kind of transport. She tried, unsuccessfully, to disengage herself—wishing to, perhaps, but not desiring to do it rudely.

"Listen," she finally resumed, with more energy: "I cannot be your wife."

"Because I am unworthy of you?"

"No. The obstacle is not on your side—but on my own. I am the dependent of the duke, an orphan and poor. Honor and pride compel me to decline this marriage with the son of the house, who is noble and rich——"

"What does that matter?"

She had taken courage, and now raised her eyes and looked him in the face.

"People would believe that there had been a shameful calculation on my part."

He made a sign of protestation.

"And it seems to me that all the good which I have endeavored to do here would no longer exist——"

"Who could doubt you?"

"Everybody would."

"Then, it is through pride? Well, Jeanne, the world may think what it pleases——"

"The world, yes—perhaps—but you, yourself, would not believe in the sincerity of my love."

"You love me, then?"

She hesitated a second.

"Yes," said she, all at once, with resolution.

A cry of joy escaped Cuchillo's lips.

"But I care for my own esteem and yours," she quickly continued. "And it is for that reason that I will not be your wife—that I shall leave—leave immediately, for now, I cannot remain here longer."

Cuchillo was intoxicated. She loved him, she loved him, after having seen him, after having lived near him. Reality had not killed her dreams.

"Jeanne!" he cried, "I adore you, and I believe in your love—I know your disinterestedness. How happy I am!"

"Leave me, monsieur le marquis. I should have left without seeing you again."

"I understand your scruples," he continued; "but they are not serious! You are poor, an orphan and the dependent of the duke—so you say?"

"Yes."

"And your disinterestedness might be doubted?"

"Oh! it is not only that," said she; "it is fear that

you, Paul, might think I had yielded through a desire for title and fortune."

"By all that is sacred, I believe in you, Jeanne! I love you—I know—" He corrected himself: "I feel that you love me! Besides, it is not you who are the debtor here; it is my father and I who are yours. You have consoled an infirm and unhappy old man—you have opened the doors of this house to me. I owe you everything. And, if you consent to be my wife, it is you who will make a sacrifice, you alone!"

"I do not comprehend you."

"You are young, and I am no longer so. You are beautiful, and the personification of purity and honor. You bring me the springtime of your life—I—I have a terrible, frightful past—before which most women would recoil."

"That is what your father told me," murmured Jeanne.

"It is you who lower yourself to me, and it is I who try to raise myself up to your level. Do not repulse me; do not cast me into despair and evil. You can save me, and make me a happy and a good man. Finish the work you have commenced."

"Paul!" said Mademoiselle de Leon, "how is it that you love me so much? Can I, ought I, to believe you? You have loved another passionately—you still loved her when you came here. You cannot have ceased so suddenly to love her——"

"What other?" asked Cuchillo, with sincere surprise.

"Your wife—Mariquita."

"Mariquita!" repeated Cuchillo, and he remained silent for a few seconds. "Eh, well!" he at length murmured, in a slow and firm voice: "What is there in common between you and her? She is no more, and were she there, living at your side, I would not hesitate a moment between you——"

Jeanne drew nearer to him.

"Yes, I loved her, and will preserve a memory of her; but, I swear to you, Jeanne, that what I now feel for you is so different from what I felt for her in the

past, and will feel in regard to her in the future, that you need not be in the least jealous."

The young girl was visibly moved.

"I loved her—I deceive myself—I *believed* I loved her, for I love *now* for the first time. Her death did not kill me; I could not live if you repulsed me."

The glance of his blazing eyes fairly scorched her.

"There is then but one question between us: Do you love me enough to forget what I have been—to confide your future and your happiness to me, as I will confide mine to you?"

"Yes," she answered.

She leaned towards him, her eyes moist yet full of an ardent and generous flame.

"Oh, yes! I love you enough, and have for a long time, a very long time, but——"

"Not another word, Jeanne. I am yours—you are mine?"

She could no longer resist. She would have had the strength to leave him—without seeing him, or if he had not loved her with this passion which had taken such a hold of him, and whose sincerity and violence would even have moved indifferent women. But, from the moment in which these two loves met, they ought to forget all in order to blend.

"So, you accept! So, you consent to be my wife, to receive my name, and to give me happiness!" he exclaimed, embracing her.

"Perhaps!" said she, joyously. "But I shall not be the one to decide——"

"Who shall, then?"

"Annette—your daughter, Paul. She, alone, has the right of authorizing me to become her mother."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MARRIAGE.

"LISTEN, Annette," said Mademoiselle de Leon, when she was alone with the daughter of Paul de Kandos, after the scene we have just described, "although you are still a child in years, I believe you possess enough heart and reason to hear and understand what I am about to say to you. In any case, I love you too much to act without your consent. You shall decide my life."

Annette opened her large eyes, and steadily regarded Mademoiselle de Leon, with more of curiosity than surprise.

"Annette," pursued Jeanne, in a rapid voice, and as if hurried on by a sort of internal fever, "have you ever had cause to complain of me?"

"Never!" replied the young girl.

"Do you believe that I love you sincerely, earnestly? Do you believe that no one loves you more than I do, your grandfather and father excepted?"

"I believe that you love me as much as grandpapa himself does," she replied, without speaking of her father; "but why these questions?"

"Do you want me to live always near you? or, at least, will it be agreeable to you?"

"Yes," said Anette, without ceasing to look straight in her face.

She answered frankly. She did not hesitate; but she was wanting in warmth, appeared preoccupied with some mental reservation, and was evidently on her guard, awaiting the key of the problem, that is to say, where these questions tended, unless she had already foreseen what was their end.

"My dear," returned Jeanne, more and more moved, and at the same time intimidated by the woman's look in the girl's fine eyes, "I have told you, and repeat it, that it is you who shall pronounce upon my future. I wished to decide nothing before knowing your sentiments; I will decide nothing without your authorization." She paused for breath, and then added: "You alone have the right to say whether you will accept me——"

"For a step-mother," interrupted Annette, with a vague smile, which appeared slightly threatening to Mademoiselle de Leon.

"Who has told you?" exclaimed she, frightened at this strange divination.

"Am I wrong?"

"No, Annette. But how did you know it?"

"Oh! I have thought of it, since I have seen you two together."

"Is it possible? How did you get the idea into your head?"

"I don't know. From the very first I felt, I divined, that which is going to happen!"

"No one thought of it—I least of all—and *I* did not wish it. I swear it to you, Annette, I have only yielded to your grandfather's prayers, Annette—and to those—of your father."

"Yes, *she* has already been dead a year!" said Annette, bitterly.

There was a short silence.

"Very well, Annette," softly said Mademoiselle de Leon. "I understand you. Reassure yourself, I will not impose myself on you; nor do I wish to."

"What do you wish to do?"

"What I ought—to go away."

Annette kept silent. She was very pale, and no longer looked at Mademoiselle de Leon. The latter went towards the door, with a bowed head but a firm step. She suffered deeply, for she loved. Still, she would have died rather than enter the duke's family against Annette's will, rather than become the young girl's step-mother without her consent, and in spite of

her opposition. She possessed, in addition to pride and delicacy, a respect for others' rights, above all the rights of the weak, which even mastered the most violent love. It had already cost her a struggle, being poor, and an orphan, to agree to become a marchioness and rich, by accepting the name of the man she adored. She had only yielded to his prayers, and those of an old man, who had said to her :

"It is not an advantage I offer you—it is a sacrifice I ask."

From the moment when Annette had objected to this marriage, from the moment when the child said :

"I do not wish to have my mother replaced !" all was finished. Nothing could have induced her to overcome this obstacle !

She already had her hand on the door knob, when she suddenly felt two arms thrown around her, and drawing her back. She turned around. It was Annette, who, weeping, said, with a feverish haste :

"Jeanne, remain ! Remain and forgive me !" and she violently embraced her. "I am a wicked girl ! Yes, I love you ! You are so good ! I have nothing against *you*. What you now refuse, in order not to wound me, another will hereafter accept. You have always been to me the best, the kindest and the most devoted friend, bearing patiently my caprices and faults. But I love you, Jeanne—I love you with all my heart. You are the only one I would be willing to have—replace *her*. Yes, dearest, be my mother, and remain—my sister !"

* * * * * * * * *

Six weeks later Paul, Marquis of Kandos, was united in marriage to Mademoiselle de Léon; or, if you prefer it, Cuchillo, the *gaucho*, the ex-galley companion of Louis Clermont, became Jeanne's husband.

His happiness was now complete, yet his joy was not unmixed, in finally becoming the husband of this adorable woman, for whom he felt such deep passion joined to such respectful admiration.

He yielded to the enchantment of his love. But many a moment of uneasiness and remorse found its way into the midst of his joy.

At times, he forgot everything but Jeanne, and the past was effaced from his mind. He believed in the part he was playing, and confounded himself with Paul de Kandos. Feeling full of honorable resolutions; feeling sure of always loving her and making her happy, he finally slept in security, caring for nothing but the present, and reassured by the absolute impunity which had accompanied his crimes and protected the plot so brilliantly contrived and executed.

"She is ignorant, and shall remain ignorant of it all," he said to himself. "She loves me, I love her. Let us be happy!"

It even seemed to him that he had come to be the dupe of his own falsehood. There were hours in which he would have been really surprised if he had been reminded that he was still only Cuchillo, the *gaucho*, once condemned for murder, titled and enriched through another murder, and that in place of being the Marquis of Kandos, the son and heir of the old duke of that name, he was in fact the illegitimate child of Marie Pruneau, and was entitled to no other name than his mother's.

Louis Clermont, on his side, had looked favorably on this marriage. "I had hoped for a rich wife for you," he said to Cuchillo, when he knew what had taken place; "but, after all, things have, perhaps, turned out for the best. The 'Little Fairy' is an orphan—a great advantage! We need not fear the inquiries or indiscreet questions which parents would be sure to ask in such circumstances—besides, the old man's fortune is large enough. Now there is nothing more to fear. Here you are, acknowledged, signed and sealed by the civil and religious authorities. Let us peaceably await the inheritance, and then—long live prosperity and pleasure!"

Everything went on for two or three months, without any cloud obscuring the horizon of the newly married pair. The old duke seemed more content than

he had ever been. All his fears for the future had disappeared. He even showed some tenderness toward his son, spoke to him with less solemnity of manner, and manifested more confidence in him.

"Happiness rejuvenates him," said Jeanne.

This did not last. It was only the flickering of the candle before the light goes out. It was as if this joy had used up the remainder of his strength. The descent was rapid, and soon it was no longer possible to conceal the fact that death was approaching. This was a great unhappiness to Jeanne and Annette, who loved the old man with all their hearts. It even grieved Cuchillo, because it grieved his wife.

As the duke grew feebler a sort of sadness and uneasiness took possession of the former *gaucho* and mastered him, as if he felt some personal evil suspended over his head.

As to Clermont, he rubbed his hands when no one could see him, saying:

"We are about to come into possession!"

A time arrived when the duke could no longer leave his bed, and the doctors declared that the end was approaching, and that the old man's hours were numbered.

Jeanne and Annette were constantly with him, taking turns at his bedside.

The duke did not suffer. He neared his end gradually and easily, without complaint. On the contrary, he hardly spoke at all, and appeared plunged, not in a torpor, for he preserved all his intelligence, but into incessant and absorbing thought.

He had wished to confess; after his confession, in place of showing the calmness which this act ought to inspire, he appeared very much agitated. For hours he moved his dry lips, as if in prayer, or speaking to himself, but without pronouncing any distinct words.

Jeanne, who happened to be with him at the time, uneasy at seeing him thus, softly asked him, several times, if he was in pain, or if he needed anything.

At first he did not answer her. One would have

thought he had not heard her. But at a fresh question he suddenly raised his head.

"Jeanne," said he, "where is my son?"

"Do you wish to see him?"

"Yes."

"I will let him know."

Cuchillo was in the next room. His wife had only to open the door and make him a sign to enter.

"Ah! here he is!" murmured the old man, in a panting voice, on hearing and recognizing his step, with that fineness of perception which so often precedes death.

"Yes, father, I am here," answered Cuchillo, advancing. "How are you?"

"Come nearer," replied the old man, "I must speak with you. Jeanne," he murmured, "leave us alone."

The young wife stooped over the dying man, deposited a kiss on his forehead, moist with untold anguish, and silently retired from the apartment.

We have said that Cuchillo, since his marriage, had been enjoying a delightful dream.

The awakening was going to be terrible.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE AWAKENING.

"COME nearer, come nearer," repeated the old man, when he had heard Jeanne go out and close the door after her.

Cuchillo seated himself in a chair by the bedside.

"Stoop down," continued the duke; "I do not wish to be overheard," he added, with a sort of fright, "and, besides, my strength is leaving me—rapidly—and it will be difficult for me to go on to the end."

"You exaggerate, father," Cuchillo tried to say, although it was very plain that death was rapidly approaching.

"No, no; I know what I am saying—it will be to-

day. I should have spoken to you sooner—but it was so difficult. A father ought never to have to blush before his son——"

Cuchillo pricked up his ears and regarded the duke with deep surprise. What did these words mean? Did this upright man, whom, in spite of himself, he respected without loving, as one respects everyone whose life has been straight and whose character has been blameless—did this man have some shameful or culpable action with which to reproach himself in the past?

The surprise which this thought caused the former *gaucho* awakened in him a sort of vague and unacknowledged satisfaction. Like all who have greatly sinned, he would feel reassured and less debased in hearing that this man, whom he had so terribly deceived, was not as worthy of respect as he seemed to be.

"I am listening to you," he said, quickly, after this first gesture of surprise.

"But," pursued the old duke, "I am going to die—and, at the moment of appearing before God's tribunal, I am no longer your father: I am simply—a poor sinner—who ought to—and who will, repair—!"

The dying man's voice grew weaker. He breathed with difficulty. For an instant, he was silent and appeared incapable of continuing this confession.

"Do you want anything?" asked Cuchillo, whose curiosity was singularly excited.

"Yes, yes!" said the old man with his lips and his head, but without producing any sound.

Cuchillo understood. He made him drink a few drops of medicine, ordered by the physician in case of any violent crisis. It was a cordial composed of a strong poison, which they had been recommended to use with great care, as a few drops too much would produce instantaneous death.

It now had its effect, which was to restore a momentary vigor, and the old man, reanimated, resumed:

"I have been severe with you, my son, even too severe, as I have been frequently told by others, and,

as I commence to believe—since I have seen you again and have observed your improvement—and your moral transformation. Then, my ideas have greatly changed, since I have felt the approach of death. If it was to do over again, perhaps I would act differently —Yes, I have sinned—forgive me—my dear son—my intentions were good, and I really believed I was acting for the best."

This avowal and humility, on the part of this man in the presence of death, had something very touching about it. Cuchillo was more moved by it than he would have liked to have acknowledged.

Besides, the approaching death-agony invested the dying man's face with an expression of genuine solemnity, already effacing the wrinkles and removing all traces of vulgarity.

"I have never doubted it," replied Cuchillo, with a burst of sincerity.

"Yes—I believed I was doing right—acting for the best"—feebly continued the old man. "It was because I had led a wicked, badly employed life in my own youth—through my father's fault—who never thought of me or my affairs—letting my mother spoil me.—They were too kind—too indulgent towards me—I wished to bring you up differently—but I did not succeed !—Was it a punishment from heaven?" he murmured to himself. "I have sometimes thought so," he added, "without wishing to believe it. Now, I do not doubt it——"

He paused again, out of breath. His voice came irregularly, in a whisper, from his dry lips.

"Rest a while, father," said Cuchillo.

"No, I will not be much longer able to speak. What was I saying to you? Ah! yes—Paul—being young —I was without the religion—which has since comforted me—I was a student at Toulouse—where I had been sent—at an old relation's—whose heir I afterwards became—and who did not look closely after me—. At that time I was dissipated, a debauchee——"

At the name of Toulouse Cuchillo had trembled

violently. He did not know that the duke had ever been in that city.

"Ah!" he exclaimed with excitement, "you have lived in Toulouse——"

"Yes; I left there only two years before my marriage, and before you were born——" He paused, and, after resting, resumed: "I seduced a poor little working-girl there—may God forgive me! She became a mother—then, I abandoned her—without troubling myself about her. I returned here—and married. Your mother was rich and of good family ——"

"At Toulouse, a working girl, a child—abandoned!" repeated Cuchillo, hurriedly.

"It was odious, yes, cowardly, criminal!" murmured the duke. "I know it, feel it, and see it, now."

"What became of this woman? And her child, where is it?" asked the false marquis, in a sharp voice.

"I do not know—that is why I sent for you. Remorse now pursues me—I have merited the grief you have caused me, for I have left, in poverty and neglect —perhaps he is dead, or has turned out badly—cursing me—another son——"

"A son!" again exclaimed Cuchillo, overcome with emotion.

But the old man heard and listened to no one but himself.

"Paul," he resumed, in an almost indistinguishable voice, "he must be found—if he is still alive—and given a helping hand—. Aid him—and give him part of your fortune——"

"His name?" asked Cuchillo.

"You swear it? I wish it—without this being done I shall not die easy——"

"His name! his name!"

"Swear—swear!"

"Yes, I swear it!—His name!"

The dying man was going fast. His lips parted, but no sound issued from them. Cuchillo believed he was

about to expire. He threw himself on him, raised him up, placed his ear to the old man's mouth, repeating, with a sort of rage:

"His name! his name!—his mother's name!"

"Marie—Marie—Pruneau—" murmured the duc, as if he was dying.

"*My mother!*" repeated the false marquis, distractedly. Suddenly he uttered a cry of horror. The whole truth had burst upon him.

"It was my brother!" he exclaimed in a hollow voice. "*It was my brother whom I killed!*" And he recoiled, staggering like a drunken man.

The old man trembled in his turn. These terrible words awakened the last spark of life he possessed. He sat up, haggard, in a delirium of agony, with which was mingled a glimpse of the awful truth.

"Who has killed his brother? Which brother?"

"I—Marie Pruneau's son; I, the abandoned child!—for I am not Paul de Kandos—No! no!"

He staggered towards the door.

"Ah! may you be cursed—for this horrible crime of which you are the cause! You have ruined both your sons!" And Cuchillo fled from the room like a madman.

The duke fell back with the death-rattle in his throat, but still managing to call out:

"Help! Stop the assassin! it is not Paul—it is his murderer!——" His voice grew weaker; still, he kept on repeating the same words in a distinct voice.

But *the duke was no longer alone!* Some one, a man, who had entered as Cuchillo rushed out, was beside him. *It was Louis Clermont.*

"I did well to watch and listen," he muttered. "We were *smoked!*"

Then, seizing the phial, three-quarters full, containing the potion, he introduced the neck of it between the half-open lips of the dying man, and emptied it—The effect was startling.

The duke arose, as if electrified, opened and closed his eyelids twice or three times, disclosing and conceal-

ing his lusterless eyes, and finally fell back dead—still forever.

[THE END.]

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